

2Peter 3:1-4 "A Call To Remember His Promised Return" Part 1

How many times has someone reminded you of certain things in your life that you might consider unnecessary? As a teen I can remember my dad thought that I was perpetually living in a fog, aimlessly wandering around, and so he felt the need to always remind me of anything and everything before I left the house. I'm sure he was hoping I would get a clue.

But this is not the reason Peter is about to remind his readers of something very important. You see, reminders often times have nothing to do with trying to dispense of a fog, but to reinforce what we already know.

Keep in mind that the entire second chapter of 2Peter was dealing with the false teachers and how to identify them and to show, from God's perspective, the heart of these people. Peter reminds his readers that these people are dangerous to the cause of Christ precisely because these false teachers are actually invited to be part of the church as they claim to believe in the Lord Jesus themselves.

This was always a danger and continues to be a danger. This is why Jesus Himself refers to them as wolves in sheep's clothing. And so, on the one hand they appear to be hard to identify, and yet on the other Peter is warning the church to be discerning enough to distinguish a sheep's costume from the real thing.

The blame for succumbing to false teaching, however, cannot be laid entirely on the leadership of the church, (though they certainly bear much of that responsibility). We all are instructed to study the word of God to show ourselves approved. And though that particular phrase is in the context of Paul encouraging Timothy in his ministry, who would suggest that it would be exclusive to one person or one office of elder?

We are all to be in the word of God so that we might know our Lord and His will better, even as the Bereans checked the word of God against Paul's exhortations. When the writer of Hebrews wrote his letter it was not just to the leaders but to the entire body of Christ and he gave this exhortation.

HEB 5:12 "In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!"

In a similar way, Peter is saying to the entire body of Christ to be on the alert and know the word of God so that you might not only be able to recognize falsehood, but also be able to encourage each other and build each other up in the faith.

And this is why Peter turns from very harsh words, directed at the false teachers, to words of comfort and edification as he now turns his attention back to the brethren who are being assaulted by these false teachers and reminding them of these truths they already knew.

2PE 3:1-2 1 "Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. 2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles."

Notice how Peter addresses them as dear friends. This is in contrast to what the false teachers have proved themselves to be in the body of Christ. They are anything but dear friends. The phrase "dear friends" is actually one word in the Greek. It's *agapetos* which means beloved, esteemed, favorite. It comes from the word *agapao* which is where we get our English word agape.

This is a love that God has for us which is sacrificial and has only our best in mind. It is best seen at the cross of Christ where both God's justice and His love are shown in the same act.

Now, some have argued that this letter is in response to another letter other than 1Peter. But, in light of all of the evidence there is no reason to think that 1Peter is not what Peter has in mind as he writes this second letter.

But it's the reason he's writing this second letter that is so important. "I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking."

Peter is trying to stimulate us, or as the NASB puts it, "I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder,...". the NKJV puts it, "I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder."

What does Peter mean by this? The Greek here is instructive. This whole idea of stimulating to wholesome thinking carries with it the idea of having our thinking, and what we put in our minds, affect our lives in a positive way.

The Greek word for wholesome is actually taken from two words which means the sun's ray and that which is pure, sincere, unsullied. When the two words are put together it implies being found pure when unfolded and examined by the sun's light, "and so it carries with it the sense of transparent sincerity". (John Stott, pg.126)

In other words, when we are examined by the light of God's word we will be found pure in a way that follows and obeys the commands of Christ out of gratitude for so great a gift of salvation.

And what Peter is saying here is that this is his objective, to stir us up to walk in the truth and bring glory to Christ. And he's going to do this as he reminds us of certain things, keeping in mind that this is all in opposition to what the false teachers are promoting.

2PE 3:2 "I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles."

Notice what Peter does here. He places the holy prophets and the ministry of the apostles, who deliver the commands of Christ, in the same context. And so, he's placing them both on the same level as being men who are inspired of the Holy Spirit and therefore bringing them the very word of God.

The holy prophets would be those inspired of the Holy Spirit who came before the incarnate Christ and recorded what we know as the O.T., while the apostles would be those who walked with Christ during His earthly ministry, inspired of the Holy Spirit, bringing us what we know as the N.T.

And so, Peter wants us to consider the whole counsel of God's word, both Old and New testaments, making up one entire book delivered to us from God. But it's in the context of this whole counsel of God's word that Peter is going to remind us of a problem and this problem has to do with falsehood in contrast to the truth as it relates to their personal involvement with these false teachers.

And so, what is it that the prophets of old and the apostles of Christ want us to recall or remember? It's that this was always foretold that we would have to contend earnestly for the faith because many false prophets and teachers would come to disrupt the people of God.

2PE 3:3-4 "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

Now, when Peter says, "know this first of all" he's really giving the sense of first importance.

And then he reminds his readers that in the last days scoffers will come and attack the truth of God's word. Now, he doesn't simply suggest that the last days are a future event and that in those last days these false teachers will come. They're already in the midst of the last days of which Peter is writing. In fact, that's the point he's making.

'Because these false teachers are in the church you can be sure that you are living in the last days', is essentially what Peter means. In fact, when the N.T. uses the phrase "last days" it always means last days in relationship to Jesus Christ coming into this world the first time. The writer of Hebrews makes this abundantly clear.

HEB 1:1-2 "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in **these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe."

When Peter was writing in the middle of the first century they understood that they were living in the last days. And because they were they could expect the fulfillment of God's word which spoke of such things taking place in the last days.

We see the same thing when James wrote to those who placed their dependence in their wealth rather than in the God who saves.

JAM 5:3 "Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days."

James is saying to his contemporary readers that they are presently living in the last days. Does this mean that there is no sense of last days which is future? Of course not.

But the point Peter and other N.T. writers make is that the last days have to do with the last part of God's plan unfolding in the Christ

who came into this world to redeem sinful men; the same Christ who was promised to Adam and Eve after they sinned.

And yes, there are still future things which the Christ must fulfill. But the last days started some 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem and then moved to the Place of a Skull when our Lord was delivered over to sinful men to be crucified. And the last days have never been the same since our Lord rose bodily from the dead defeating sin and death for us. And the last days give us the promise that Jesus will return again.

The scoffers of course would take issue with this in both Peter's day as well as ours. Peter speaks of scoffers or as other translations put it, mockers. Whenever we think of a scoffer or a mocker we usually think of someone who expresses a derogatory meaning to those things we hold dear. They consider it nonsense. They make fun of our beliefs which are based on the word of God.

Just look at the media when they do commentary on those who take the word of God seriously. How many times have you heard them scoff at the idea that Christians actually have the audacity to believe and promote that homosexuality is sinful. We're accused of being homophobes as though the ones who are really sick are the ones who haven't come into the 20th and now almost the 21st century as we hold to prehistoric ideas that God judges such sin.

Or that God has actually designed women to have desires for motherhood and creating a home where both children and husband are her main ministry. To most in the media this is laughable. When you even hint that women could possibly be fulfilled being moms and wives at home they can't resist calling us Neanderthals who don't have a clue regarding the real world.

And I suppose they're right if the only world that exists is theirs. God teaches us that we are not of this world, nor is our King who came to give us life eternal. But in "the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires."

These make-believe teachers of righteousness scoff and they follow after their own evil desires with the intent of promoting themselves all the while denigrating the truth. And what truth do they scoff at?

2PE 3:4 "They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."

Why are these scoffers picking on this particular teaching? Why are they so concerned about a promise that refers to the future coming of Christ? The first thing we notice is that this is a teaching which has to do with a promise which is yet unfulfilled. It strikes at the heart of the faithfulness of God.

But it is a promise that encapsulates a variety of events that are all tied up in this coming that Christ promised. The question is, what is this promise and what does it entail?

It actually entails a number of things, but one of the main things is that it is a promise that Christ will return in the same way He left after His resurrection and ascension, that is, bodily.

The return of Christ must of necessity be as sure as His first coming which He promised to Adam and Eve in the Garden. If this does not take place, then the very character of God is called into question as it relates to His faithful word.

And this is at the heart of the matter regarding the false teachers who are calling this future event into question.

But in this future coming, this coming of Christ, there are a number of particular events which range from judgement to resurrection to rapture.

And so, to call Christ's message into question, calls His very truthfulness into question and places them in a superior position to the Lord Jesus Himself. This is what false teachers in the church do.

Remember, these false teachers are ultimately trying to divert attention away from Christ and place it on themselves. They want to be the center of attention. What better way to do it than to undermine the truth that Christ has no intention of coming back.

If you can convince people that a God, whom you can't see, has given the church a representative, you can see, who has the authority to carry on in his name, then this places that representative, (false teacher), at the pinnacle of power.

But, what it also does is to take away the hope that is intrinsically tied to that return of Christ, what the Lord calls the blessed hope.

Titus 2:11-14 ¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Paul also refers to this same event, as the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:26-27 ²⁶ *that is*, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, ²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This kind of language is utilized by the Spirit of God for a reason. It is designed to give us a hope of a future, to be attained in its fullness when Christ comes back as He promised the disciples on the day of His ascension back to the Father. So, this is a big deal and what the scoffers, during Peter and Paul's day were doing, is downplaying and even denying that it would happen at all.

But the bigger picture here is that this coming of Christ issues in the Kingdom of God that was promised from ages past.

And so, the hope of glory and the blessed hope would certainly be compatible with a discussion of the kingdom of God at the return of Christ. But let's go back to Titus 2:11-14 for a moment.

One of the things to note about Titus 2:11-14 is that Paul puts this blessed hope into perspective from both a present reality and a future reality. Our present reality is to understand that the grace of God has appeared, and the inference regards the first coming of the incarnate Christ, to live, die and rise from the dead to secure redemption for all of His people.

But in this present reality we are to understand that in light of Christ paying our debt in full and forgiving us of our sin, then it would only make sense that sin must be something from which we flee. It is not to characterize the life of a believer in this present age.

But it is because of the future age that our hope begins to be fanned as the fire of Christ's life in us anticipates what it is that we are saved unto. In other words, our Lord expects His people to always

be looking down the road at the end of the race and to long for the prize at the end of the race. Paul used this same imagery.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 ²⁴ Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. ²⁶ Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; ²⁷ but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.

Notice how Paul puts both the present and future into the same context with the same aim which is to win the prize. What race is Paul talking about? And what does he expect to win at the end of that race?

Part of any race includes a starting line and a finish line. Paul's starting line is where he was in life at the time of this writing. And the context of this writing has much to do with his work for Christ. In fact, in verse 23 he makes it clear as to what he felt his work for the Lord was.

1 Corinthians 9:23 ²³ I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

He would go anywhere and speak to anyone for the sake of the gospel which was his present work, but he also knew there was a future reward in that he not only wanted to share the good news with all men that they may be partakers in the kingdom of God and Christ, but he says I also want to be a partaker in it, which certainly has future implications for Paul.

This was his race in this world, to run for Christ, but to run in such a way as to gain the prize; not that he was trying to earn the prize but that he would finally arrive at the finish line where Christ and His kingdom were waiting for Him.

The wreath that he anticipated was not one of earthly reward but of eternal reward, that which is imperishable. And I don't think that Paul chooses this word imperishable without something else in mind that is also tied to the wreath or prize at the end of the race.

In fact, it is in this same letter that Paul describes the prize in some detail using the same language he does in 1Cor. 9:25 regarding the imperishable wreath.

1 Corinthians 15:50-55 ⁵⁰ Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. ⁵⁵ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?"

Paul understood what the prize was at the end of the race. The end of the race was death being swallowed up in victory. And Paul's victory was in Christ who has made us more than conquerors. But the prize also includes the plan that God always had in store for His people and that is in the swallowing up of death where a new life is found in Christ and that life is one of imperishability; a resurrection body to be with our resurrected Lord forever.

But it's precisely within this context that Paul says back in 1 Cor. 9 that he doesn't run this race without an aim or uncertainly as other translations put it. But the idea is that Paul understands certain realities about this new life in Christ.

He runs the race with one aim in mind and that aim is demonstrated in our present world with a life of holiness and gratitude toward our God and Savior, but is ultimately manifest in the future age to come.

I used to run in my younger days. I never competed in any formal 5K or 10K or marathon runs, but I ran long distances just to stay in shape. In that type of running there is really no race involved. It's just running as you put one foot in front of the other, knowing at some specified distance you finally arrive back home. In fact, at some point you almost become numb to everything else that is around you and you simply focus on running.

But to run in a race is something entirely different. There is a plan and a strategy and special preparation. And though I never competed in track in school I did play both football and baseball. And I learned in both disciplines that you run with an aim. In other words, running no longer becomes just a chore but it has a specific goal in mind.

Now, granted when you're practicing from Monday through Thursday it certainly seems like a chore, especially in Ft. Lauderdale during August when you're preparing for the upcoming football season. Temperatures would reach into the upper 90's and in those days water was not allowed to be on the field.

But even during those trying times you still had an aim and a goal and it was Friday night under the lights. You practiced all week to shine for that temporal wreath if you will. But it seems that many Christians don't have an aim in their race and unfortunately many Christians don't seem to view a life in Christ as a race at all. They treat it more like a spectator sport.

Paul never saw his life like that. He knew that life was tough and it certainly had its ups and downs, but what kept him going, in a way that desired to glorify God in his body, was always the prize of knowing what he was running for and who he was running toward.

He always kept the two in harmony because he knew that the promise of the kingdom of God was a promise to be with a person and in a place. In fact, Jesus Himself frames it this way when describing the new heavens and new earth.

Revelation 21:1-3 ^{NAU} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

The new heavens and the new earth are real places designed by God for His resurrected people to dwell in and rule over with Christ the King, who dwells among us. The King is the person we love and serve, but the King, who gives good gifts to His people, has given us an inheritance and a paradise where we can enjoy Him forever. The two are inseparable, the King and His kingdom.

But when we understand the person who has given us a life and a hope, we now have an aim in mind knowing that this present life is part of the race to honor Christ in the process. And so, we run in such a way as with this aim in mind. It is in this context that this present life has meaning even in the midst of trials and tribulation, or in times of plenty. Christ must be our aim and at the center of life as His life works in us as we move toward the prize.

And so, there is this blessed hope of a future life with Christ and the hope of glory, Christ in us, that secures it. They are both related. And the scoffers of Peter's day, who are also around today in the church, do not want us focusing on this blessed hope associated with the coming of Christ.

They are all related in the sense that the coming of Christ, that is associated with the blessed hope, is also dependent on what Paul calls the hope of glory in the context of this mystery.

Colossians 1:26-27 ²⁶ *that is*, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, ²⁷ to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

This mystery that Paul speaks of has to do with the Gentiles. From a Jewish perspective this should not have been a mystery but it turns out that way because of their refusal to see how the Scriptures always looked forward to including, not just the Jews, but also the Gentiles in the kingdom of God.

In fact, the very person the Jews would claim as their father was Abraham, and it would be Abraham they would hold up as the icon of their unique and, in their minds, the person who guaranteed the exclusive position they had with God, and yet we know the promise that was given to Abraham by God included all the nations, both Jew and Gentile.

Romans 4:16-18 ¹⁶ For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. ¹⁸ In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

At the time that God chose Abraham and covenanted with him to represent Him in this world, the Lord changed his name from Abram to Abraham.

Genesis 17:5 ⁵ "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.

And it was Abraham who understood that when the Messiah would bring His kingdom into this world in the last days, he would finally receive the promise of the inheritance of the land.

Hebrews 11:8-10 ⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

This is to take place at the coming of our Lord, of which Peter addresses as he warns the church of the false teachers who, in the last days, will deny such a coming. This is why it is so important to understand what takes place at this coming and why we need to be teaching the church the importance of this great event.

Next time we'll expand on this important subject and hopefully we'll come away with a better appreciation of why the second coming of Christ must be put in its proper context and what that second coming will actually entail, because a lot of different things will be happening on that day.

Let me end with this today.

Luke 12:34-36 ³⁴ "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ³⁵ "Be dressed in readiness, and *keep* your lamps lit. ³⁶ "Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open *the door* to him when he comes and knocks.