

Living the Good Life • 2 Peter 3:14-16

Author Herb Miller tells an interesting story about two Kentucky farmers. They owned stables with race horses and developed a keen rivalry. One spring they each entered a horse in a local steeplechase race. Hoping to improve his chances of victory, one of the farmers secretly hired a professional jockey to ride his horse.

The race was close with the two neighbor horses running neck-and-neck while holding a large lead over the rest of the field. Suddenly, unexpectedly, something went wrong. Both horses stumbled and fell, throwing off their riders. The professional jockey acted quickly, remounting and riding on to win the race. When he returned to the paddock he was surprised to find the owner who had hired him fuming with rage.

“What’s the matter?” the jockey asked. “I won, didn’t I?”

“Oh, yeah,” the farmer said. “You won all right. But you crossed the finish line on the wrong horse!”

The professional jockey was quick to remount after the unexpected fall but he had mistakenly mounted the competitor’s horse and had ridden it across the line to victory.

It’s funny when it’s a horse story but it is tragic when it’s our life story. That’s why St. Peter wrote what we read in 2 Peter 3:14-16. He was looking at the finish line of human history and advising us to make sure we are on the right horse.

Let me give you a few quick reminders of what we have already studied in 2 Peter. First, 2 Peter almost didn’t make it into the Bible. During the early centuries of the church it was often neglected, ignored or excluded. Some Christians didn’t think it measured up to the rest of the New Testament. They doubted it really was written by Peter. But, the little letter would not go away. Churches kept reading it. Christians studied the words. And the deeper they looked the more convinced they became that it was worthy to be counted as the word of God.

Each Sunday you are encouraged to bring your own Bible to church. In fact, sometimes I have

asked you to hold up your own Bibles to prove that you have brought them with you. I quit doing that because I don’t want to badger you. We also stopped showing the Bible text on the screens hoping that you would be encouraged to look at your own Bible. Showing the passage on the screens is convenient but could promote some biblical laziness.

In this study, 2 Peter 3:16 demonstrates one of the reasons it is a good idea to bring your own Bible to church and see the words for yourself. It says that some people distort the Scriptures. One way to watch out that I don’t distort the Bible is to bring your own Bible and check out what is being taught.

Write in the margins of your Bible. Underline. Become so familiar with your Bible that you can look up teachings for yourself. You will hear, remember and understand the Bible far more if you engage the text for yourself and don’t just listen.

I won’t remind you every week. And I’ll not badger you. But, I actually do look around to see who’s carrying a Bible in and out of services and in the hallways. I like to listen to the turning of the pages. If you don’t usually bring your Bible to church, just do it for three months and you will start a habit that will last for a lifetime.

Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:14-16:

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear

brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave to him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and

unstable people distort, as they do other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

When Peter says “you are looking forward to this” he is referring to the finish line of current

...live the kind of moral life now that you expect to live in the future.

human history. But to understand what he means here we need to go back a line or two to recall exactly what he is talking about in 2 Peter 3:13 where he says that “*we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth.*”

The focus here is on the Bible’s prediction about our future home that will last forever. Frankly, there is enormous misunderstanding about this. The Bible teaches that our world has a limited life expectancy. The earth was created by God and the earth is going to be destroyed by God. Our world won’t last forever. God will replace it with a new earth. The vision of that was seen by the apostle John when he writes in Revelation 21:1-4:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

So the earth has a life expectancy. The earth as we know it will be destroyed by God. But it will be replaced with a new one. And we will live on that earth. This does get confusing because we routinely talk about our eternal home in heaven. I admit I don’t fully understand this and can’t adequately explain it. But the point of the new earth and the prediction in Revelation 21 is not that we go to heaven to be with God but that God comes to earth to be with us.

So, what might that actually look like? When we die we go to heaven to be with God. But this is a temporary setup until the culmination of human history. Then Jesus will return to earth and there will be a great judgment of humankind to determine everyone’s eternal destiny. Christians will receive new bodies called resurrection bodies that look like our present bodies so we will be able to recognize one another, but they will have all kinds of major upgrades. God will destroy the earth we

now know and he will create a new earth that will be vastly improved. And we will have homes on this new earth.

Will we be with God? Absolutely! God will be both here on earth and there in heaven. Does that mean we won’t be in heaven? My guess is that we may have two homes and freedom of travel.

Of all people, Minnesotans who have homes in the Twin Cities and cabins at the lake should understand this concept. In fact, some people have family cabins that were built 50-100 years ago and are wearing out. Many have torn down the old cabin and built a much improved cabin. We spend winters in the Cities and summers at the cabin. Sometimes we go back and forth the same week or even the same day. So, think of the new earth in the same way. We will have two addresses—a home in heaven and a home on earth.

Peter’s point here is that Christians are looking forward to this. 2 Peter 3:13 says that “*we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth.*” Or maybe you say, “I don’t look forward to this at all! I like it where I am. This scares me. I don’t like change.”

It’s hard to persuade people to embrace a better tomorrow when they like the problems of today. So my best advice is to simply trust God. He knows what he is doing and he is planning a tomorrow that will be better than anything we can imagine. It will be a perfect world with peace and prosperity, no more sickness, tears, pain or death. It will be the best of the best. Trust God. You’ll really like it! Look forward to “*a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness*”!

Are you convinced? Are you looking forward to what God has planned? If so, then read what Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:14 where he says, “*So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*”

Peter is saying that every Christian is headed into a great future and that we should look forward to it. But we should also live forward. We should start living today like we are already there. Practice up for heaven. Practice up for a new earth.

Think of it this way. You have won a fabulous vacation in Hawaii—lying on the beach in Waikiki, climbing up the volcano on the Big Island, surfing the Bonsai Pipeline on Oahu. If you are really look-

ing forward to your fantastic Hawaii vacation, start living for it now. Brown up at a tanning booth. Get in shape for the beach. To get ready for mountain climbing, do some hiking every day. Start wearing hula shirts. Prepare now for what you're anticipating later.

The Bible says here that every Christian has a future in God's perfect heaven and earth. We should live forward in anticipation by "*making every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with (God).*" In other words, live the kind of moral life now that you expect to live in the future.

This line from Peter raises a question: What does it mean to be "*spotless, blameless and at peace with (God)?*" What do you think it means? Isn't it simply that we live by God's values and priorities right now? What does that mean when it comes to paying employees fair wages? What does it mean in terms of our sexual attitudes and behavior? What would "*spotless*" and "*blameless*" mean in business ethics? How about when paying income taxes?

Notice something very important here. Peter doesn't define a spotless and blameless life. He doesn't tell us to be perfect. He invites us to "*make every effort*". It is mostly a matter of desire, attitude and commitment. Do I really want to do what is right? Do I want to be moral? Do I desire to be honest? Is my goal in life to avoid evil and pursue righteousness? More than anything else, do I want to please God and be at peace with him?

If we really want to be the right kind of person, we will find a way to do it. If we really want to do what is evil we will find a way. Peter tells us to get ready for forever by living today the way God wants us to live for eternity.

Chiune Sugihara had a lifelong dream to become the Japanese ambassador to Russia. By the 1930s he was well on his way to fulfilling his dream. The emperor of Japan had appointed Sugihara as his ambassador to the country of Lithuania.

His ambitions were coming true, but then his life took an abrupt and unexpected change of di-

rection when he was awakened one morning by a large crowd that had gathered outside his embassy home. They were Jews from Poland who were seeking visas to Japan to escape the German Gestapo and deportation to Nazi death camps.

Compassionate for the needs of these people, Ambassador Sugihara wired Tokyo three times for permission to provide visas. Three times he was told "no". Sugihara was a committed Christian who decided to defy his country's orders and probably end his diplomatic career. For 28 days he wrote visas by hand. He wrote visas around the clock, barely eating or sleeping. The Japanese government found out what he was doing and immediately summoned him to Berlin. He kept writing visas. Even at the train station he kept writing visas, handing them to Jewish refugees through the window of the train as it departed for Germany.

It is estimated that he saved over 6000 lives. Recalled to Tokyo he was dismissed from diplomatic duties and spent the rest of his days selling light bulbs. Years later when his heroic story was told someone asked his son, "How did your father feel about his choice?"

Chiune Sugihara's son replied, "My father's life was fulfilled. When God needed him to do the right thing, he was available to do it."

He is the kind of Christian God will recruit to be his ambassador somewhere on his new earth. He is the kind of person Peter had in mind. He's the kind of person we are called to be. He made

every effort to live a life that was spotless, blameless and at peace with God.

We don't have the same situations that were faced at the beginning of World War II but in our society we constantly have the challenges and opportunities to live the kind of life now that we are called upon to live forever. Is our deepest desire and effort to live the lifestyle of the rich and famous or the lifestyle of God and eternity?

Peter adds four helpful and interesting pieces of information in 2 Peter 3:15-16:

Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother

Is our deepest desire and effort to live the lifestyle of the rich and famous or the lifestyle of God and eternity?

Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

The first piece of information is that God is patient. Peter reminds us again of what he taught back in 2 Peter 3:8-9 when he writes:

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Some people think God is lazy and slow in fulfilling his promise for the culmination of human history, but that is a gross misunderstanding. What God has been doing is compassionate and patient. Because he doesn't want anyone to be lost for eternity he has repeatedly delayed his judgments so that more and more people can believe in his Son. God is not a slowpoke. He wants as many people as possible included in his new heaven and new hearth. God is patient!

The second piece of information is that the Bible is consistent. St. Peter says that the writings of St. Paul agree with what Peter is teaching here. In other words, all biblical authors were under the direction of God. The message of the Bible is coherent and consistent. It all hangs together. It all communicates the same truth.

St. Peter makes me laugh with his third point when he says that St Paul's "*letters contain some things that are hard to understand.*" It gives me great comfort that even the Apostle Peter had

trouble understanding some of the stuff in the Bible. I'm not alone! If Peter couldn't figure it all out, what are the chances I'll figure it all out? The point here is not that most of the Bible is difficult but that some of it is not easy. The Bible reveals and declares God's great truths—and some of it can be hard to understand.

Finally, Peter warns us against some "*ignorant and unstable people who distort the Scriptures to their own destruction.*" His advice is to watch out for people who make the Bible say what they want it to say instead of listening to what God is saying. His warning isn't against bad people or evil teachers. His warning is against those who may be really nice but are ignorant (that is, they don't know what they are doing or teaching) and those who are unstable (that is, they are mentally and emotionally dysfunctional).

Here is a quick summary of what Peter has written: If you are a Christian, God has a great future for you. So, today—start living like tomorrow!

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