A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

2 Peter 3:1–18

Key Verse: 3:13

“But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.”

What are you looking forward to? Some of our expectations are just immediate. We can be looking forward to eating something delicious, or to getting a good night’s sleep. We can be looking forward to seeing an old friend, or getting back to school, or for the work day to finally be over. Some of our expectations can be further away. It might be a vacation or wedding day, or having children or grandchildren, or the day when we can have a new leader. The problem with all our expectations is that there are bigger problems in the world that can ruin everything. Accidents and tragedies, and people’s bad behavior can rob us of our dreams and leave us feeling crushed. In today’s passage Peter encourages us to be looking forward to something beyond our wildest dreams. What is it? Why should we be looking forward to it? How can we? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

In this letter Peter mainly has been encouraging Christians to live godly lives. But it’s not easy. The world we live in is just the opposite—very ungodly—and it’s constantly trying to pull us away from God. In our sinful nature our own desires also are often ungodly. To live a godly life, Peter told us in chapter 1 that we need to hold on to God’s very great and precious promises (1:4). In chapter 2 he told us, in the midst of corrupt people, we need to put our hope in God, who knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteousness for punishment (2:9). Now in chapter 3 Peter reminds us of our greatest hope of all.

Read verse 1. Though he’s the top leader of the church, Peter addresses these people as “dear friends.” The point of both his letters is to “stimulate” us to “wholesome thinking.” In Greek, “stimulate” is literally “wake up.” And the word “wholesome” is literally “pure and sincere.” Living in this messed up world, we all can become spiritually tired or dull, and our thinking can become jaded and cynical. We’ve all probably heard of the power of positive thinking. If we think we can’t do something, we probably won’t. Our way of thinking is especially important if we’re going to live a godly life. We regularly need to be woken up spiritually, and even our way of thinking needs renewal. It needs to be always pure, sincere, spiritually healthy. But how? Read verse 2. The words of the prophets and the command of Jesus through the apostles are basically the whole Bible. And wholesome thinking starts when we remember God’s word. This is why we all need to keep on studying the Bible regularly. And we all need to train our way of thinking to be based on the word of God (cf. 2Co10:5). This is why, though it may seem corny, it’s really good to memorize Bible verses.

Read verse 3. The “last days” are not some distant time in the future; they’re right now. The last days started ever since Jesus died and rose again and poured out the Holy Spirit on believers (Ac2:4,17). In Greek it says “scoffing scoffers.” What does it mean? To scoff means to make fun of or mock. Comedy is good; even God has a sense of humor. But these scoffers don’t have wholesome thinking. Psalm 1:1 says, “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers…” Why do these scoffers scoff? Verse 3b says, “…following their own evil desires.” They’re making fun of God’s truth so they won’t have to follow it.

And there’s a specific truth of God they’re mocking. What is it? Read verse 4. They mock the notion of the second coming of Jesus. It never seems to happen. To scoffers, it seems totally ridiculous to be waiting for such a thing. But our Lord Jesus clearly promised that he will come again. He said, “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mk13:26). And he said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Mk13:31). Back in 1:16 Peter wrote, “For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” When Peter, James and John saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain, it was just a preview of his glorious second coming. But people would rather not believe it. Why? It’s so that they won’t have to be held accountable for how they’ve lived. But we’re all way more accountable than we realize. Jesus said, “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken” (Mt12:36). It’s pretty sobering.

Yes, it seems that the world just keeps going on as it always has. It’s a daily reality. But there are some other realities, too. Read verse 5. Basically, this is the first reality: God made the world. God created the heavens and the earth. How? It says “by God’s word.” In Genesis chapter 1 we see that God spoke, and things came to be, out of nothing. Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what is visible.” It tells us the unimaginable power of God’s word. Then there’s a second reality. Read verse 6. This is referring to the flood of Noah’s time. God destroyed the whole world with a terrible flood. It really happened, but it’s so easy to forget that it happened. But that flood was just a preview of what’s going to happen when Jesus comes again. Read verse 7. It says, “By the same word.” It means we can be sure that day is coming, because God said it would. It’s not some obscure, questionable prophecy; the whole Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is full of promises of the day of the Lord, the final day of judgment. It’s not debatable; it’s a core Christian teaching, and nobody can get rid of it. There’s a dire warning here: on that day all the ungodly who ever lived will be “destroyed.” In verse 7 the words “reserved” and “being kept” suggest that it’s in a holding pattern, something we have to wait for. And sometimes, especially when people are scoffing at the Christian faith as outdated and flaunting their ungodly lives, it can seem like it’s taking way too long.

Read verse 8. This is a very famous Bible verse. It tells us that God is very different from us. To God, a day is like a thousand years, probably because there are so many events going on all over the world in so many people’s lives. But at the same time, to God, a thousand years are like a day, because God exists in eternity. To God, waiting a thousand years is like waiting just one day. Because of who God is, we shouldn’t think it’s taking too long or it’s not going to happen. Why is God waiting at all to send Jesus to come again? Read verse 9. This is such a beautiful truth about God: God is patient. God is patient with us sinners. He bears with us. He’s patient both with those struggling to follow Jesus and with those still ignoring him. There’s another beautiful truth about God: God doesn’t want anyone to perish; he wants everyone to come to repentance. God is so gracious and loving, he never delights in the death of the wicked; he really wants people to turn from their evil ways (Eze33:11). And there’s a third truth about God here: God’s patience has a point; through his patience he’s trying to lead people to repentance. Romans 2:4 says, “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?”

One day God’s patience will come to an end. Read verse 10. “Like a thief” means nobody will expect or know when it is. Jesus said, “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” It’s a tip top secret. But it’s going to be devastating: “The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.” There’s going to be no hiding place, no escape, total exposure of every thing and every one. It’s scary.

How should we respond to this? Read verse 11. Again Peter says we ought to be living holy and godly lives. It’s the only way to really prepare for Jesus’ second coming. We need to take it seriously. If we aren’t living holy, godly lives, we’ll be dreading that day. But if we’re really struggling to live holy, godly lives, we’ll be thinking about it differently. How so? Read verse 12a. Peter says the godly are actually *looking forward to* the day of God. He repeats these words “looking forward” in verses 13 and 14. And in verse 12 he even adds that the godly “speed its coming.” Basically it means godly people aren’t *avoiding* it; they want it to come *faster*. The Bible ends with the words, “He who testifies to these things says, ‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev22:20). This is the cry and prayer of the godly: “Come, Lord Jesus!”

Peter repeats his description of the day of the Lord in verse 12b: “That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.” But that’s not all. Something else is also going to happen. What is it? Read verse 13. When Jesus comes again, he promised to make all things new (Rev21:5). Actually, this idea of a new heavens and a new earth was first mentioned by the prophet Isaiah. God told him, “See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind” (Isa65:17). Isaiah 66:22 says, “‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the LORD, ‘so will your name and descendants endure.’” The Apostle John saw this same vision in the Book of Revelation: “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” (Rev21:1). Peter says here that it’s a place “where righteousness dwells.” What does that mean? Revelation 21:3,4 says, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the 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’” (cf. Isa25:8). “Where righteousness dwells” means God himself will dwell among us and comfort us forever. But it also means God’s holy people also will dwell there. Revelation 21:27 says, “Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”

Right now we have to live in this fallen world cursed by sin. People try to build a nice life for themselves here in so many ways. But things so easily can be spoiled by others, or even by ourselves. Our pride, our selfishness, our evil desires, can ruin even the best human situations. We can grow so tired of human evilness always ruining everything. But God has a plan. Through our Lord Jesus, who shed his blood to forgive our sins and cleanse us, he plans to make everything new, including us. Philippians 3:20,21 says, “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” Apostle Paul wrote, “As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man” (1Co15:48,49). In the new heaven and new earth, we all will be like Jesus our Lord: humble, loving, beautiful and glorious like him.

Ever since human beings lost paradise, we’ve been like Cain, restless wanderers on the earth, longing for a true home. Some places may feel like home, but it’s only temporary. No place on this earth can really be our permanent home. But one day, when Jesus comes again, he promised to bring us back to our eternal home with God (Jn14:2,3), the new heaven and new earth. It may seem too good to be true. But it says, “in keeping with his promise.” We can believe it because God himself promises it to us. Based on his promise, we can think about it, dream about it, look forward to it, and even long for it. It’s such a wonderful hope, which God really wants each one of us to have and hold onto.

With this hope, we have a reason to struggle spiritually. Read verse 14. When Jesus comes again, we can be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him not by our efforts, but by depending on his blood shed on the cross for all our sins. His grace and his gift of the Holy Spirit empowers us to live a holy, godly life that makes us ready for his coming at any time. In verses 15,16 Peter mentions Apostle Paul’s letters in the New Testament, which also point us to this glorious hope. People distort Paul’s teaching on grace to say they can go on sinning. That’s not what living by grace means. What does it mean? Read verses 17,18. Here we find the best spiritual direction and prayer topic there could ever be: to keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We can pray this for little children, teenagers, young adults, newly married couples, couples with children, and senior citizens: keep growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

Read verse 13 again. Though we live in an ungodly world with many scoffers, may God help us keep looking forward to the wonderful day when our Lord Jesus comes back and gives us the best home, the new heaven and new earth, where we get to dwell with him forever.