THE MORNING STAR

2 Peter 1:12–21

Key Verse: 1:19

“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

Happy New Year! Have you ever experienced the negative effects of not paying attention? Maybe a teacher was explaining something in a class you really needed to pass, but at the key moment you just happened to zone out? Maybe a friend was sharing his heart with you, but your mind was somewhere else? Or maybe you were driving and got distracted, and later you found that for a long time you’d been driving in the wrong direction? So many problems, accidents and even tragedies occur simply because we weren’t paying close attention. In life there’s all kinds of noise we probably should ignore. But in today’s passage Peter tells us something we really should be paying attention to. When we do, he says something amazing happens to us. So, what really deserves our attention? What good thing is Peter talking about? Why do we need it? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his living word today.

Look at verse 12. The main idea here is “these things;” the author repeats it again at the end of verse 15. What are “these things”? It’s a summary of verses 3–11, where Peter mainly urges all believers to live a godly life in Christ. Because there’s so much corruption and evil desire both within us and around us, living a godly life can seem unattainable. But Peter says God gives us all we need to do it, especially through knowing him and through holding onto his very great and precious promises (3,4). Peter also explains that it’s a gradual, growing process, which culminates in our showing godly love (5–7). Growing in godliness keeps us from being ineffective and unproductive Christians (8,9). It also prepares us to someday receive a rich welcome into our Lord’s eternal kingdom (10,11). Even though we may know everything and be firmly established in the truth, we all need to be reminded always to keep growing in godliness.

Look at verses 13–15. Peter says he’s soon going to put aside the tent of his body and depart. He’s referring to his imminent execution. He knows his life on earth is nearly over. So he’s especially concerned about all the believers who will outlive him. He repeats the words “remind,” “refresh your memory” and “remember.” It’s so easy to forget what we learn, whatever it is. It’s especially easy to be led astray from pursuing godly Christian living. It’s so easy to melt into the culture around us, living according to the pattern of this world (Ro12:2).

To help them and us, Peter points not to the past but to the future. Read verse 16. His main point here is “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power.” He’s going to go into this more in 3:10–13. There he calls it “the day of the Lord” or “the day of God.” It’s the day when Jesus will come back to this world. It wasn’t just Peter; even our Lord Jesus himself predicted it. He said, “At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” (Mk13:26; cf. Mk14:62). This future “day of the Lord” will happen suddenly, like a thief coming in the night (Lk12:38–40; 1Th5:2). It was not something Peter and the other disciples made up, like cleverly devised stories. No, they had witnessed it with their own eyes. Peter writes, “…we were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (16b). He’s referring to the time when Jesus took Peter, James and John with him up a high mountain, where he was transfigured in glory before them. “His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them” (Mk9:3). Read verses 17,18. This overwhelming experience was not just for them to enjoy at the moment. It was a preview of what it will be like when Jesus comes again. This special preview was to help these men tell others about Jesus’ coming again in power and help people believe it will surely happen someday. In chapter 3 Peter mentions how many people scoff at the notion that Jesus will come again. They think everything just keeps going on as it always has. They think God is too slow in keeping this promise. But to God, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. We believe the second coming of Jesus not as a blind leap of faith or a vague promise, but because of this powerful, eyewitness experience of Peter, James and John.

Look at verse 19a. Peter further supports Jesus’ second coming by mentioning the “prophetic message.” What is this? It’s basically a summary of one of the main messages of the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the expression “the day of the Lord” is used 18 times specifically, and many, many more times generally. The prophet Daniel gave this prophetic message. 7:13,14 reads, “I saw in the night visions, and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom is one that shall not be destroyed” (ESV). In 12:2–3 he wrote: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” The prophet Isaiah also repeatedly gave this prophetic message of the day of the Lord. He said it will be a day when the Lord alone will be exalted, and everything and everyone proud and lofty will be humbled (2:11,12,17,19,21). The prophet Joel wrote that the day of the Lord will be “great and very awesome,” and hard to endure, when “the sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood,” but when “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel2:1,11,31,32; cf. Ac2:20,21).

Because so many of God’s prophets wrote about it, this prophetic message of the day of the Lord is “completely reliable.” In verses 19–21 the words “prophetic,” “prophecy” or “prophet” are repeated five times. Some people think Biblical prophecy is nothing but cleverly devised stories, mere human interpretations, or somebody’s own will. But Peter makes it clear that everyone who wrote down these prophecies in the Scriptures “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (cf. 2Ti3:16). These written prophecies in the Bible help us believe the second coming of Jesus is really going to happen.

So why does Peter spend so much time here, six out of ten verses, emphasizing the second coming of Jesus? In light of verses 3–11, it’s to motivate us to pursue growing in godliness. If there’s no day of the Lord, if Jesus isn’t really coming back, then we should follow the world’s philosophy of “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1Co15:32b). But if this hope to see him someday is real for us, then we’ll want to be ready for him; we’ll have the best reason to really struggle to be pure (Lk12:40; 1Jn2:28; 3:2,3).

Read verse 19. This isn’t just today’s key verse; it’s an important verse in the whole bible. There are many kinds of prophecy; some of it really does come from the Holy Spirit, but a lot of it is totally bogus. Peter urges all believers to pay special attention to the prophetic message in the Bible. Pay attention! Achtung! Jumoghada! When Jesus was teaching, large crowds came, but not everybody was paying attention. Some just wanted him to heal them, or give them bread. Some had hearts so hardened by problems that they couldn’t absorb what he was saying. Some heard him but got carried away by desires for other things. Some let life’s worries, riches and pleasures consume them (Mk4:1–20). Even his disciples had selective hearing and thought he was talking about an earthly kingdom (Ac1:6). Today people go to church their whole lives and still, nothing really sticks. But Jesus promised that those who persevere in truly hearing God’s word gain the secrets of the kingdom (Lk8:10,15).

The key is to “pay attention to it.” But what does that really mean? During his missionary journeys Apostle Paul went around to many places sharing the gospel. Once, in a city called Thessalonica he tried to reason with people from the Scriptures about Jesus. But things quickly turned into a mob riot. Why? Because people misunderstood that he was talking about a political revolution. Right after that, Paul went to a place called Berea. The Bible says that these people “were of more noble character.” They weren’t just casual listeners; “they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” Wow! It wasn’t just “in one ear and out the other;” they were motivated, and really seeking. As a result, many gained real faith, even prominent men and women (Ac17:1–12). To “pay attention” to God’s word, we need to search “intently and with the greatest care” (1Pe1:10).

Here Peter says we’ll do well to pay attention to it “as to a light shining in a dark place.” It’s a powerful image. What’s this “dark place”? It’s a metaphor for a place of confusion, of many lies, deception and evil, a place that can be so discouraging and hopeless. On our own we could never figure out how to get out of there. But if we keep looking, we might see a small light shining, way off in the distance. At first it might seem insignificant, but if we keep paying attention to that light, it can give us new hope and eventually lead us out.

So what’s this “light”? Peter’s talking about the prophetic message of the Scriptures, also known as God’s word in the Bible. Psalm 19:7,8 says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” Psalm 119:105 says “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Verse 130 says, “The unfolding of your word gives light...” In Hebrew “unfolding” is literally “doorway,” meaning it shows us which way to go. The world teaches us many things. People give us all kinds of advice and push us this way or that. But God’s word can truly enlighten us and give us light for our path.

The question is, are we really paying attention to it? It’s not about having attention deficit disorder (ADD). Honestly, so often we can’t pay attention because our hearts are divided (Ps86:11; Eze11:19). In the hymn “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” there’s the line, “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.” We may think we’re smart, self-sufficient and in control, but we human beings are all like sheep, always ready in a heartbeat to turn to our own way (Isa53:6a). We so easily forget what God has said, what he’s done for us, what he’s commanded and promised us, and our commitment to him. Verse 13 says we all need to “refresh our memory,” which in Greek literally means to be “stimulated” or “stirred up” to be sincere (see also 3:1). To pay attention, we really need God’s grace and God’s help, and, the help of Christian fellowship, to spur one another on and encourage each other (Heb10:24,25).

Read verse 19 again. This tells us, in a sense, that Bible study is like an act of faith. At first, we don’t see the light; we’re dark, cut off from God and have a hard heart (Eph4:18). But as we pay attention to God’s word, something beautiful starts happening inside us. Peter says “the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” The morning star is something sailors and fishermen look for when they’re out all night on the sea. The morning star appears in the eastern sky just before sunrise, and it helps them regain their orientation and direction. It also gives them hope that a new day is coming. Peter uses it as a metaphor for our lives as Christians. Without the morning star in our hearts, we don’t know where our lives are going. We feel empty, meaningless and without hope. In brief, we feel lost. But as we pay attention to God’s word, Jesus, the light of the world, the bright, morning star (Jn8:12; Rev22:16), begins to shine on us, even in all our darkness, and hes guide our feet into the path of peace (Lk1:78,79).

At the beginning of a new year many people make resolutions to improve their lives, such as to eat better, exercise, get out of debt, save money, or many other good goals. Many others lack motivation and feel that all these struggles are useless. It’s like improving is optional, like we can take it or leave it. Today we learned that Jesus is surely coming again, and so we really need to strive to grow in godliness. To do so, we need the spiritual direction that only Jesus the morning star can give us. May God help us really turn to him and ask his help. May he have mercy on each of us in this new year 2021 to really pay attention to his word, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. May God help each one of us to come to him in these last days of 2020 to really listen and find the best key verse to help us grow in godliness in the new year.