

2Peter 12-01-13a

This is Friday the 13th of January, 2012. We continue our study in the book of 2 Peter. We're in chapter 3, and we'll briefly be back in verse 10, but moving quickly through verse 13 and following.

So, let's take a moment as we begin to ensure that we've prepared our hearts and minds for the study of God's Word and the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. Father, it is such a comfort to remember that the life to which we have been called and the righteousness that we are to produce is not something of our own making. It isn't something we can create or generate in our own power or under our own steam.

You have provided every good and perfect gift, every resource, every faculty that we need. We need only lay hold of it by faith. We thank You for the Lord Jesus who has opened the way to life and light for us through His work on the cross, His continuing mission of intercession on our behalf, His waiting for the day of return and of bringing us to Himself so that we will enter into the next phase of Your plan.

We know that the time that remains to us is short, and in this time we have the opportunity to learn and grow in grace and knowledge through the study and the application of the truth of Your Word. We pray that as we spend time in fellowship and in study this evening in this great book of 2 Peter that God the Holy Spirit will superintend both the presentation and the reception of these things, that each of us will find in it truth that is pertinent and meaningful and applicable to our situation, the challenges and the opportunities that face us, and that as a result our lives day by day will increasingly reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and fulfill Your plan and purpose for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's read this passage just to kind of get our minds back into the context. 2 Peter 3, verse 10 and following.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat. I think this is going to be a spectacle worthy of observation. We by that time will be outside and beyond this universe and it will be like looking at the pillar of cloud or the pillar of fire or the Shekinah or the throne in the midst of the glassy sea or any of the other great manifestations of God's power that have been observed in human history only greater and grander and more impressive.

This entire universe is going to be reduced to something molten by a very noisy process and it's tempting to think that this melted remnant of the entire universe that creates this vast noise in whatever lies outside this universe is in fact the lake of fire. Everything in this universe that is not rescued by God's grace through the work of Jesus Christ remains in this universe and almost by definition ends up in this puddle of molten fire. Lake of molten fire.

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God because of which day the heavens will be dissolved being on fire and the elements will melt with fervent heat? You know how chiasms work by now, I'm sure. And we've got the heavens passing away, the elements melting with fervent heat at the beginning and at the end of this little mini parenthetical bracketed structure. What's right in the middle? You remember in a chiasm the most important thing is emphasized by that which is preceding and following it that has sort of a symmetry and a mirror type effect.

What's in the middle? What manner of persons ought we to be? Interesting that the real purpose of eschatology, the real value of studying prophecy is not to know exactly what's going to happen in what order and what sequence to what group at what time. The real value of studying prophecy is motivation for being the kind of people that we should be. The more clearly we see the upcoming future, the more it conditions our present responses and our present behaviors, doesn't it? You know that if you're a student when there's a major project or paper or examination coming due, it makes you a different kind of person.

If you're a good student, you work hard on that particular subject. You spend extra time studying and reviewing and trying to enhance your understanding in the light of this upcoming event, right? Most people wouldn't take a deep interest in these subjects except that your future depends on that grade, that evaluation. And because that looms ever nearer day by day and hour by hour, it changes the kind of person that you are.

Well, I would love to go to that party. I'd love to watch that movie. I'd love to play that game.

I'd love to roll over and sleep. But here is this impending event, so I'm going to be a different kind of person. I'm going to be studious.

I'm going to be diligent. I'm going to be cracking the books and burning the midnight oil, trying to put as much of this into my at least short-term memory as I can, right? An impending upcoming event that has certitude and importance changes us. Vacation coming up.

Somebody's visit coming up. Job performance review coming up. Inventory coming up.

Whatever it may be. End of the month with bills being due. Important impending events shift our priorities, don't they? It changes what we think is important.

It changes how we spend our time. Well, Peter says, what could be more important than the end of the universe as we know it? What could be more important than the resolution and dissolution of all things and moving entirely into the realm of God's spiritual dwelling place and kingdom? Well, it's impending. It's important.

So what kind of people ought we to be? He puts it in this little chiasm, surrounded by a molten

universe. I don't know how you could possibly put a gem in a more emphatic setting than to say, destruction of the universe. What kind of person should you be in the light of the destruction of the universe? Imagine the reaction if our astronomers suddenly alerted the press that there was a near-Earth object on a collision course with this planet due to impact tomorrow afternoon.

Tomorrow afternoon, asteroid as big as the state of Vermont is going to hit, intersect this planet. Everybody knows anything of that size, anything a fraction of that size would obliterate life on this planet. Something really about the size of a tanker truck or a destroyer, still solid, hitting this Earth at interplanetary speeds, forget it.

This is a life-ending event. It doesn't have to be that big. So it's on all the channels.

Every cable station drops all of its inane, useless programming. And all you can see is, here are the telescopes, here are the pictures, here are the worried scientists, here are the governments scrambling. What are we going to do? Well, there's nothing we can do.

Can we shoot it down? No. Can we flee? No. Can we hide? No.

Can we get deep enough in the ground? No. Can we get up in the air? No. Can we go out to sea? No.

What do we do? What are the options? I've only got hours to live. Well, now what? Am I worried about my paintings? Am I worried about my investments? Am I worried about my possessions? The end of the world tomorrow afternoon. Certitude.

No way of escaping it. Would it shift people's priorities? Would it change the way they spent their time? Well, of course it goes without saying. Peter says, people, believers, do you realize that we're basically in that situation? We have a bit more time, but the universe is going to be eliminated.

So what kind of people ought we to be? Materialistic or spiritual? Earthly or heavenly? Mundane or divine? Well, in the abstract, it's an easy question to answer. It's in the practical, because we're going to get up, we're going to get in our cars, we're going to go home, we're going to grab a snack, we're going to do whatever we're doing, late night, Friday night, put on our little night caps and go to bed, plan on sleeping in and maybe check the schedule to see what time the playoff games are on. Life goes on.

It's not happening yet, so because it's somewhat more distant, I'm not as worried. A lot of you students have just gotten your syllabi and your curricula and your other scheduli that tell you what's coming up in your semester, and you see that there's a midterm somewhere in, I don't know, early March or somewhere, and you think, eh, I'm not worried about that yet. I haven't even started classes.

Well, it would be good to start planning. I know students that are already working on their first

week's reading and homework assignment because the syllabus says you will have this done on the first day of class. Be prepared to be tested on the first day of class over the reading, and the semester hasn't even started yet, which is a bit depressing, but that's how it is.

So it all depends on how proximate we think something is. Well, I know tax time is coming up on April 15th, but hey, I've got months, and so we're slack and we're lax, right? We say, eh, even though I'm going to get my forms this month, probably, if we haven't already, we'll get them before the end of this month, you can file your taxes anytime. But how many people are standing in line at the post office minutes before midnight on the 15th filing taxes? Wouldn't it be great to be well-prepared? Wouldn't it be great to have them done in advance? Wouldn't it be great to show up at class and be fully prepared? Give me a test, I pass it.

Well, if there was any one subject where we would do this, wouldn't we want it to be the spiritual life that defines us for all eternity, that is the basis of our evaluation when the Lord Jesus Christ returns? At what time? We don't know. Your heart could stop before I finish this lesson. Your brain could have an aneurysm.

Your health could fail. Probably won't. Hope it doesn't.

Try not to let that happen until I'm out of the room. But you don't know. You could get smacked on the highway going home tonight, those of us that drove here.

Nearly got smacked coming down here. You just don't know when time is up. Are we ready? Are we prepared? This is the point.

So think about it in these terms. Peter is about to die. He's about to leave.

And he says, look, these are my final thoughts. This is what I want to hand off to you. Peter the Apostle, Peter the Companion of the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to put you in remembrance.

I did a little exercise, which you might want to follow if you don't mind marking your Bible. We're coming to the end of this letter. And I thought, what is it when Peter was making all of this emphasis, what did he want us to do? How do you express a to-do grammatically? What do we call that? We call it an imperative, right? Where are the imperatives? Where are the things that say, do this? Well, I just looked through real quickly, and forgive me if I missed one.

I just gave it a quick glance. But if you're looking at your Bible, look at chapter 1 of 2 Peter. You've got the greeting there, grace and peace, and so on.

The first imperative I spotted is in verse 5. He has sketched out God with His grace and mercy and the gifts that He's given us that pertain to life and godliness and so on. He's given us exceedingly great and precious promises. So for this very reason in verse 5, giving all diligence, add those things.

Add to your faith, virtue. Add to your virtue, knowledge. Add to your knowledge, self-control.

Add to self-control, perseverance. Add to perseverance, godliness. To godliness, brotherly kindness.

And add to brotherly kindness, love. So if you were going to try to summarize that first imperative, what would you say? A. Be godly. Give diligence to being a godly person.

Isn't this sort of the long definition of godliness? You've got faith and virtue and knowledge and self-control and perseverance. And godliness isn't this sort of a different listing of essentially the same fruit of the Spirit that you have in Paul's writings? So this is the imperative. Peter writes and he says, look, be diligent to cultivate these attributes of godliness.

Be diligent, pay attention to your spiritual development. Add, grow, get better at, right? Is that a fair summary of the first imperative? I'm going over this because we're going to be finished with 2 Peter and maybe two or three months from now, somebody will say, well, let's see, 2 Peter. What is that thing about? We spent a long time on it.

I wonder if I can remember anything from it. Well, this is what we should remember. It's the imperatives.

What are we supposed to do? We've read the letter. We've studied the letter in detail. What should it create in us? What should it motivate? What should we be doing because we've been exposed to the truth of this letter? Well, here's the first thing.

Number one, be diligent to cultivate spiritual growth. Fair? That's the first one. Look down in verse 10.

Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure. Be diligent to grow. Be diligent to cultivate your spiritual life and be even more diligent to make your call and election sure.

You remember when we went over this? This is not making your salvation more certain. What is our calling? What is our choosing? We're chosen for a purpose, right? It's not just to be saved. It is to be fruitful.

As all of you know by now, I have planted grapefruit seeds because I thought, hey, they're free. I'm buying all these grapefruit. They're giving me the seeds.

Why don't I just plant them? Someday I'll have my own grapefruit tree and I won't have to buy so many of them. It'll have these wonderful Texas ruby red grapefruits just hanging off it in vast bushel quantities and I'll just have my own. Well, I planted these seeds and there's two trees that survived out of the seven or eight seeds that I planted.

Nice, strong, healthy things. Patty's been taking great care of them for me. They're in for the winter.

They're getting bigger and stronger. Now, why did I plant those seeds? Do I want a tree? No, I don't want a tree. I want fruit, right? The tree is the means to an end.

I have planted the seed. I've nurtured these things and watched them weed themselves out by natural selection. The ones that can't survive my sporadic attempts at watering them have weakened and died.

Only the strong ones have survived. I've got two strong trees. I've now turned them over to more professional care.

But I don't want the trees. I don't just want a tree. I want the fruit.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not die just to save us, so that he could have some saved people hanging around. We're supposed to be bearing fruit. Paul, over in Romans, branches were broken out of God's tree.

Why? Because of faithlessness. If God just wanted branches, he could leave them there. If he just wanted a tree with branches, what's wrong with these branches? What's wrong with those branches is what? No fruit.

Branches have broken off because of unbelief, and these other branches have been grafted in. I'm going to graft in some Gentiles to see if they will bear fruit. And he says, so don't be boasting over the branches that got snapped off, because the only reason you're in the tree is to see if you'll bear fruit.

And if you don't bear fruit, you'll be snapped off also. And if these other branches wake up and realize why they are a branch, God will graft them back in. The issue is fruitfulness.

The issue is growth. So in verse 10, what is it? Be even more diligent to make your call and your choosing sure. God didn't call us and choose us to be static.

He called us and chose us to be fruitful. Remember Jesus over in John 15, I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me and you'll do what? Bear fruit.

Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, what does my Father do? Prunes it off. Every branch in me that does bear fruit, what does my Father do? Prunes it so that it will bear more fruit. The issue is fruit.

Be diligent to cultivate your spiritual life. Be even more diligent to fulfill the purpose for which you have a spiritual life, which is what? Bearing fruit. That's verse 10.

Look down at verse 19. This is the next imperative I spotted. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed.

Heed the word. You would do well to heed the prophetic word. Why? Heeding the prophetic word is what enables us to bear fruit.

What is fruit? What's another way of saying it? What's the theological spiritual term for fruit? Righteousness by works. Righteousness by faith. Oh, that's weak.

If you can't bear it any better than you can say it, I am really disappointed. Righteousness by faith. One more time.

Righteousness by faith. All right, now that's more like it. Righteousness by faith.

This is the fruit. Now, what is faith? Faith cometh by hearing. Hearing is hearing the word, right? The word of Christ.

The word of God. So why would Peter say, we have this prophetic word confirmed, and you would do well to heed it? Why? If you're going to do these imperatives, you've got to have the word. This is why we have Bible class.

We have four Bible classes a week. Why? So that all of us have got plenty of biblical truth, divine truth to aim our faith at, because this is where the faith operates. We don't have faith in pie in the sky, by and by.

We don't have faith in abstractions. We don't have faith in platitudes. We don't have faith in aphorisms or in happy expectations.

We have faith in concrete promises, principles, and doctrines, propositional truths of the word of God, right? We lay hold of these by faith. We do like Moses. We say, Lord, I expect this from you, because this is what you have said.

King David, Daniel, Ezekiel, Moses, Joshua. Name your faithful Old Testament saint, Job. I know that my Redeemer lives.

I will see him from my flesh. The worms may eat me, but I will still see him in my flesh on the last day. I know whom I have believed.

I am persuaded. Faith. And we operate on that basis.

I'm not going to panic. I'm not going to worry. I'm not going to fret.

I'm not going to sin in my mind. I'm not going to sin with my tongue. I'm not going to sin with my hands and my feet, because I know certain things.

Righteousness by faith. Be diligent to cultivate spiritual life. Be diligent to fulfill the purpose for which we have a spiritual life.

We would do well to pay heed to the prophetic word. We have that word made more certain. So that's verse 19.

And in the very next verse, know this first of all. That's an imperative. Know this.

Keep this in mind. As you do these other things, you're going to cultivate the fruit. You're going to cultivate the purpose.

You're going to cultivate an understanding of the word to make all that happen. But you've got to know that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private derivation. You've got to be sure as you launch out on this life of faith that you aim your faith at valid truth.

You've got to be able to identify divine truth. You've got to find someone who elucidates it and teaches it. You've got to find it for yourself.

You've got to find it in a book. Find it on the radio. Find it on the Internet.

Find it somewhere. But you've got to have that truth. It's not somebody's private notion.

It isn't someone's made up ideas. It has got to be divine truth or the faith process is not going to lead to righteousness. Putting faith in somebody's schemes, putting faith in somebody's misinterpretations isn't going to work.

It has to be faith in God's word, not privately derived ideas. This is why ritual-based and falderal-based denominations and derivations of Christianity, I will pick on Catholicism just because it's a convenient target. All of the ritual, all of the confession, the smoke and the wafers and the rituals and the falderal and the candles and the purgatory, private interpretation.

It's not in the word of God. Where does the word of God say anything about praying to Mary, paying any undue attention to Mary? It's not in there. The Catholics can't get enough of Mary.

Where does it say anything about 90% of the other things that go on? Trust me, there are believers in the Catholic Church, but it's like trying to swim through molasses to make any spiritual progress because you are surrounded by privately derived ideas. Teaching for doctrine the traditions of men. That the Pope has got some kind of red phone to God, which he doesn't.

So, know this. It's a fundamental truth. Of all of the possible things Peter could say you need to know, what does he say? Be sure you've got solid biblical truth to aim your faith at, or you can't do these other things.

You've got to find and latch onto and cling to good, solid, biblical truth. You need to be hungry for

it. Proverbs chapter 2. I don't have to quote it for you.

That's the attitude. So, interestingly, you go all the way through chapter 2, and it's a description, a helpful description, of false teachers. I didn't spot a single imperative anywhere in there.

There were false prophets among the people. There'll be false prophets among you, false teachers. Here's a description of them.

Here's how you can spot them. But he doesn't attach any imperatives to that that I saw. And again, I didn't do a scientific study or a computer search.

I just read through it. The next imperative I found is in chapter 3. Chapter 3, verse 2. I'm writing to you, stirring up your minds. You should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets in the commandment of the Lord and Savior, spoken by the apostles.

You be mindful. Isn't this pretty much the same thing again? He's bracketed that whole second chapter of false teacher information with be diligent to get good truth. That's the starting point.

You cannot advance with poor teaching, poor understanding, poor grasp of scriptural truth. It needs to be nutritious. It needs to be edifying.

It needs to be up-building. And I don't care who you are listening to, me or anybody else, if you do not find in your Bible class something that you can latch on to that gives you fresh energy and fresh impetus and fresh motivation and fresh encouragement and fresh comfort, then you've got to go on the search to find it. It's there.

No one guy is everybody's pastor. No one guy is everybody's teacher. But everybody has somebody.

There is somebody somewhere who has got the teaching that can put, you know, ethyl in your gas tank and get you going on high octane. So find it. That's basically what 3.2 says.

Remember the words spoken beforehand by the prophets, the Savior, as communicated by the apostles. You've got to have that truth. Same thing in 1.20 and in 3.2 basically.

Then he says again in 3.3, but know this. We had a know this in 1.20. We've got another know this in 3.3. Know this, first of all, that in the last day, there's going to be a lot of mockers. There are going to be people who discount and dismiss the importance of everything Peter has just said.

Ah, you're wasting your time. You've got a false view. The universe isn't going to melt.

Jesus isn't coming back. It's a material universe. You need to concentrate on the present.

Why don't you pay attention to the environment? Why don't you pick up a can and throw away

your hairspray and get a different kind of air conditioning for you on? Think about the environment. Save a snail darter. Help the polar bears.

Do something in the material world and try to fix it up. Recycle. Buy an electric car.

Something. Do something in the present. Your pie-in-the-sky buy-and-buy is a waste of time.

Live in the present. Live for the moment. Live like the rest of us do who are in the darkness and are asleep and unaware of the impending judgment of God.

Have a short-term view. Come on. Look at us.

We're happy. Eat, drink, and be merry. And leave off that last part about tomorrow.

Eat, drink, and be merry. That's all we want to care about. And you should do the same.

Join us in our myopic short-term don't-see-that-the-car-going-90-miles-an-hour-is-300-feet-from-a-large-tree. Just enjoy the speed. Enjoy the ride.

Isn't this fun? Know that scoffers will come. Mockers will come. Know this.

Interestingly, of these basic fundamental things that Peter has given us in this letter, he's talked about how our life works. Righteousness by faith. Pay attention to it.

Think about it. Pursue it. Don't forget the purpose for which Jesus saved you.

Remember, the source of it is good truth. And keep in mind, there are going to be a lot of people who try to tell you that you're on the wrong track. Expect it.

Prepare for it. Don't be discouraged by it. If you don't have somebody trying to discourage you, you're not in the fight.

If you don't have somebody shooting at you, you're not in the battle. If you're doing what you're supposed to, you are going to hit opposition. There's going to be flack.

Peter says, get ready for it. Know this. First of all, there will be mockers.

Look down in verse 8. Beloved, do not forget this one thing. He says, don't forget there's going to be mockers. And also, don't forget that God has got his own clock.

Don't let the mockers make time-based arguments. God's got his own clock. And what people construe as weakness or delay or ineffectuality or non-existence is their twisting of God's mercy.

The reason there are no eruptions of miraculous judgment in the present day, Pat Robertson notwithstanding, although the tsunami and the earthquake came to judge the people, God isn't doing that. And so people say, well, I don't see God. When's the last time anybody saw God? It's

mythology and so on.

They're mocking. Peter says, look, the fact that God is being merciful and is waiting for the fullness of the Gentiles to come in, this is grace. This is mercy.

And it is being twisted as weakness or non-existence or what have you. It is the source for mocking. So at the same time that you observe the mocking, remember that the reason God has withheld the manifestation of his presence, do you think God is petty enough to want to come down and just prove a point? You say, I don't exist? Well, watch this.

And he sticks his face through the fabric of the universe. Ha, told you. God is not that petty.

God is waiting to manifest himself, because on the day of God's manifestation, options run out. Judgment falls. Nobody has any chance for salvation once God proves that he exists.

You know, you hear these stories, well, if God exists, may he strike me dead. And the guy is not struck dead. And he says, see, told you God doesn't exist.

As though God is going to operate at the behest of some naysayer. But it's the mercy of God. If God did manifest himself, it's judgment time.

So Peter says, don't forget this, know this. A day is a thousand years, a thousand years is as a day. And now we're down to verse 11.

And this is our most recent imperative. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of person ought we to be? Since all of these things are true, what ought we look like, live like, be like? Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. We've got four more imperatives that we're going to cover in our second session tonight that finish this letter.

So we'll pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we'll pick up at verse 13.