

## 2 Peter 3 Why God doesn't do something

Last Sunday we looked at the previous chapter 2 Peter.  
 In our first week, we saw Peter's main reason for writing the letter.  
 He wants the church to stay on track after he dies.  
 He gave the church clear instructions for staying on track.  
 He told them what they ought to do.  
 Hold fast to the apostolic message.  
 Hold fast to the message the eyewitnesses have given you from Jesus.  
 Hold fast to the prophetic message.  
 Hold fast to the message  
 the prophets have given you from the Holy Spirit.  
 Hold fast to the Scriptures.  
 Last weeks, he told them what they ought to avoid.  
 Avoid false teachers.  
 Avoid them because they deny their master.  
 They deny the Lord Jesus.  
 Avoid false teachers because their lives are characterised by greed.  
 Avoid false teachers because their lives are characterised by depravity.  
 Avoid false teachers  
 because their lives are characterised by lawlessness.  
 Avoid false teachers because those who are sucked in by them  
 are left in a worse state than before they'd even heard of Jesus.

Now we turn to the final chapter of 2 Peter.  
 What has he got in store for us now?  
 Well Peter is true to his word.  
 In 1:12 he told us  
 that his intention is to keep on reminding his readers of these things.  
 And in chapter 3 we have more of the same.  
 Injunctions to hold fast to the Scriptures  
 and to avoid being sucked in by the false teachers.  
 However Peter changes his perspective slightly.  
 It's a bit like looking at Melbourne from the top of Mt Dandenong  
 and looking at it from the top of the Rialto.

It's the same city you're looking at,  
but you have a different perspective.

In chapter 2, Peter focused on the lives of the false teachers  
their greedy, depraved and lawless lives.  
In chapter 3, he focuses on their teaching.

So first of all, hold fast to the Scriptures.  
Verses 1&2 and verses 15&16.

Peter says,

"I have written both of them as reminders  
to stimulate you to wholesome thinking."

What does he mean by wholesome thinking?

"Recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets  
and the command given by our Lord and Saviour  
through your apostles."

Those two verses are a condensed version of the last half of chapter 1.

They give great authority to the Scriptures.

The churches Peter is writing to never met the prophets,  
and the apostles will soon be all dead.

There's only one way they can remind themselves  
of what the prophets and apostles have said.

Read over it in the Scriptures.

And when they read over it in the Scriptures,  
these aren't human words they are reading.

In the OT, these are the words of the holy prophets.

Which is a short hand way of saying what he said in chapter 1.

"No prophecy ever came by human will,  
but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

The words of the holy prophets.

The words given by the Holy Spirit to the prophets.

In the NT, these aren't human words they are reading.

These are the commandments of Jesus,  
they're God's words.

They just happen to be spoken by the apostles.

It's not something else,

You know the bit in red letter or something,  
that's the commandment of Jesus.

No, it's everything that Jesus commanded the apostles to speak.  
It's the entire NT Scriptures.

What are Peter's readers to do with these scriptures?

They are to recall them.

Now in the Bible 'recall' means a whole lot more than 'call to mind'.  
Recall means remember.

For example when God says to Noah,

"I will remember my covenant  
and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh."  
Remember means call the covenant to mind and act on it.

Peter's readers need to make sure  
the Scriptures are called to mind and acted on.

We need to commit ourselves to doing the same thing.

How's your Bible reading going?

Is the only time you read your Bible at church and at home group?

I know life is busy.

But we make space for the things we value.

At the moment I make space for some exercise every morning.

Because I like the fitness I got during lockdown.

Despite busyness,

if we prioritise things they happen.

It's the encouragement of our friends.

I don't exercise by myself.

Either I run with Lech or do PE with Cherida.

We need to encourage each other in our Bible reading.

Make it a project to do some solid reading of Esther  
over the next few months.

Other people at church are going to be reading it.

You can find times to talk with them about what they are reading.

If you aren't part of a home group,

you could have a coffee with someone and talk about what you read.

Bible reading is actually hard work.  
That's what Peter says in verses 15-16,  
"Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation,  
just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to 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."  
If things are hard to understand  
it's going to require hard work to understand them.  
Notice what Peter doesn't say,  
'Some things are hard to understand  
so you don't need to bother with those parts.'  
No he says,  
'Recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets  
and the command given by our Lord and Saviour  
through your apostles.'  
and  
'His letters contain some things that are hard to understand.'  
Implication,  
if you want to avoid distorting the Scriptures to your own destruction,  
you're going to have to do some hard work.  
But it's the same as any other hard work.  
It's got a payoff.  
If I get up and do some exercise,  
I get fit  
I feel more energetic, more alive.  
If you do the hard work  
recalling the words spoken by the apostles and prophets,  
you'll be spiritually fit,  
you will "grow in the grace and knowledge  
of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."  
That the result that Peter longs to see in verse 18.

But there is another option.

The false teachers are still lurking.

In verse 3 Peter says,

“Above all you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.”

A word of explanation.

When Peter says ‘in the last days’

he means ‘in the time between Jesus resurrection and his return’.

He’s not saying ‘just before the end’ or something like that.

From the perspective of the Bible story,

the time after God has sent his Messiah

is the last days.

We’re in them now.

And that usage is consistent across the NT.

Where ever you read about the last days

in your Bible reading,

it’s talking about ‘the time between Jesus resurrection and his return’.

Above all you must understand this,

that right now until Jesus comes back again,

scoffers will come

scoffing and following their own evil desires.

Now I want to do a bit of an aside here.

I want to think for a moment about how Peter describes the people who oppose him.

Here in verse 3 they’re scoffers who follow their own evil desires.

In verse 5 they deliberately forget.

In verse 16 they’re ignorant and unstable and they distort the scriptures.

In verse 17 they’re lawless.

And that’s only in this chapter.

In Chapter 2, Peter’s language about them was even stronger.

Peter’s description is inflammatory, isn’t it?

I mean I've got to say  
I've never met or heard of a person who would describe themselves in  
those terms.

“Hey, I'm a scoffer who indulges my own evil desires.

I deliberately forget.

I'm ignorant and unstable and I distort the scriptures.

No one tells me what to do man.

I'm lawless.”

It's ludicrous, isn't it?

No one talks like that.

But we are taught that the only polite and reasonable way  
to talk about those who oppose Christ,  
is to use language that they would be happy with.

Let me give you an example.

Suppose I was describing Philip Aspinall the Archbishop of Brisbane  
and recipient of the order of Australia  
in the Queen's Birthday honours list.

I would say that he is a liberal theologian  
who actively promotes diverse expressions of gender and sexuality  
amongst the clergy of his diocese.

That's a description that Philip Aspinall would happily agree with.

He must.

He hosted a renewal of marriage vows  
for a transgender woman and her wife  
who are both members of his clergy  
in his cathedral.

What I wouldn't do is say,

“Philip Aspinall is a false teacher  
who scoffs gospel message.

He's ignorant, he deliberately forgets the truth  
and he distorts the Scriptures.

That will lead to his own destruction  
and the destruction of those who follow him.”

Why wouldn't I say that?

I might get sued.

But more than that,  
 it's just not the done thing to attack senior colleagues.  
 Even if you think it's true you just don't say it.  
 But Peter does!  
 When Peter describes the false teachers  
 he leaves you in no doubt about what he thinks!

My description, "A liberal theologian  
 who actively promotes diverse expressions of gender and sexuality  
 amongst the clergy of his diocese," is true.

What's wrong with it?

"There's a long animal shaped like a garden hose on the floor near you.  
 It's colours don't really blend in with the carpet.  
 It's got scaly skin and its head is lifted about 10cm above its body."

If that were true,

I'm sure you'd rather I said,

"There's a 2 metre snake on the floor.

Watch out, it's ready to strike!"

The first description is true.

But it misses the gravity of the situation.

When there's real danger,

you need a warning that grabs your attention,  
 one that motivates you to sit up and act.

When we give polite and conciliatory descriptions of false teachers,  
 I wonder whether we've forgotten that the situation is grave.

I wonder if we remember

or indeed actually believed in the first place,

that getting bitten by a false teacher

is worse than getting bitten by a tiger snake.

I wonder if we don't see things

with the same urgency that Peter sees them

because we've forgotten that judgement day is coming.

The scoffers will tell you that you're very rude for calling them that.

"I'm not a scoffer.

It's just I'm over the childish evangelical fervour.  
 I use more sophisticated ways of reading the scriptures.  
 I like to consider them in the light of modern science,  
 and see what the Holy Spirit is telling us today.  
 I don't want to construct a paper pope.  
 It's important to worship God,  
 not the words printed on a page.  
 Those people long ago had important insights about God,  
 but they were only men you know.  
 We need to consider their insights along with the insights God is giving  
 us today.  
 I'm not a scoffer.  
 But I think it's important not to be naïve.  
 I'm a very reasonable enlightened theologian.  
 And judgement day.  
 That's a construct of medieval monks.  
 The Jesus I worship is a God of love."

Judgement Day.

That's what Peter's scoffers didn't believe in either.  
 "Where is this promise of his coming?  
 Everything just keeps on going the same as it always has."  
 Seems true, doesn't it?  
 How can we be sure that Jesus will come back?  
 It seems like the world will go on forever.

There is one powerful thing that will stand forever.

It's not this world.

It's God's word.

In his first letter Peter quotes Isaiah,  
 "The grass withers, the flower falls,  
 but the word of the Lord stands forever."

God's word is what lasts

not this world.

God has acted decisively by his word before.



God created the world by his word.  
 The universe you see is here because of God's powerful word.  
 God has already judged the world once by his word.  
 It was by God's word the earth was flooded in Noah's day.  
 God has acted powerfully by his word before.  
 He gives his word he will judge the world again.  
 The word he gives to you today  
 is the same word he acted with before.  
 Incidentally it's the same word that he wants us to recall in v1-2:  
 his word in the Scriptures.  
 Those who scoff at judgement day,  
 are scoffing at God's word.  
 And his word is totally reliable.

Well, judgement day is a fierce title  
 to describe the day Jesus comes back.  
 There is another description that Jesus used.  
 "The kingdom of God is at hand."  
 His disciples were so looking forward to the Kingdom  
 that after he rose from the dead,  
 at the start of the book of Acts,  
 they said to him,  
 "Is it going to be the kingdom now Jesus?"  
 They were like kids looking forward to Christmas.  
 The false teachers were saying to Peter's readers –  
 "If you believe that Jesus is coming back to inaugurate the kingdom,  
 then God's a bit slow keeping his promise."

Let me tell you about Angela's party dress.  
 Angela was 9 years old.  
 And she'd been invited to a school friend's party.  
 She didn't have a party dress to wear.  
 Her mum couldn't afford to buy one.  
 But she promised Angela she'd sew one for her.  
 Angela was very excited about the party dress.

She'd pester her Mum.  
Are you going to make it today mum?  
The day before the party came.  
Angela's mum got out her sewing machine.  
She started sewing a dress  
made from red fabric with little white flowers.  
When it came time for Angela to go to bed,  
Angela was excited.  
But she could sleep  
because she could see her dress starting to take shape.  
Soon after Angel was asleep,  
a terrible thing happened.  
The needle on the sewing machine broke.  
Angela's Mum had no spare needle.  
The shops were closed.  
The party was the next morning.  
What could she do?  
Angela would be mortified if the dress were not finished.  
You can't tell a 9 year old,  
'Sorry. Your dress will be ready in a few days.'  
You would be slow about keeping your promises.  
So Angela's mum took the dress off the machine,  
sat on the couch and began to sew by hand.  
Stitch by stitch.  
One at a time.  
She pricked her fingers till they bled.  
2am came.  
3am came.  
She was still going.  
When morning came.  
Angela woke early bright with excitement.  
She rushed into her mother's room to wake her up and try on the dress.  
Her mum wasn't there.  
Where could she be?  
Searching the house, she found her asleep on the couch.

With a red frock with white flowers finished in her lap.

Our God is like Angela's mum.  
 He's not slow keeping his promises.  
 But the day of Jesus' return is not unreservedly happy,  
 like a new frock for a nine year old girl.  
 Jesus' return is a great day for those who follow him,  
 and a disaster for those who don't.  
 It's a day of destruction for the godless  
 that creeps up like a thief.  
 If it seems like God is slow,  
 that slowness is patience,  
 he's not holding back on us delaying the party.  
 God is delaying to give more people time to repent.

Well, thinking about the final judgement  
 is not just pie in the sky when you die.  
 It has present effects on how we live now.  
 That's what Peter says in verse 11.  
 Since this earth is going to be destroyed,  
 how should we live?  
 First of all, with holy lives.  
 Lives of holiness and godliness, he says in v 11.  
 Strive to be found at peace with him, spotless and blameless,  
 he says in verse 14.  
 Which is interesting, because in verse 13 of chapter 2,  
 he described the false teachers as spots and blemishes  
 but we are to be without spot or blemish.

Everything on this earth is going to be laid bare it says in verse 10.  
 God's sure promise is a new home where righteousness dwells v13.  
 In view of the embarrassment  
 of having our ways disclosed by the final judgement,  
 and in view of getting ourselves ready in advance for our new home,  
 We need to live lives of holiness and godliness.

People who are moving to Queensland give away their warm clothes.  
People who are moving to heaven give away their ungodly living.

Since this earth is going to be destroyed,  
how should we live?

First of all, with holy lives.

Secondly, looking forward to and speeding the coming day of God.

Verse 12.

For us judgement day is not something to be feared,  
it heralds the kingdom of God,

It's something to be anticipated.

Let's wait for it eagerly.

Peter also says we should speed its coming!

'Hold on a minute,

Isn't judgement day a bit out of my hands?

How can I speed its coming?'

Peter doesn't actually say

but let me make some suggestions.

We pray our Father in Heaven hallowed be your name,

Your kingdom come.

If we pray for Judgement day to come,

that might speed it up.

Peter says in this chapter that the delay in the coming of judgement day  
is because God is patiently waiting for people to repent.

If we faithfully preach the gospel

and people repent,

that might speed it up too.

So let's wait for and speed the coming day of God.

I'm going to finish today with two completely impossible ways  
you could apply this passage.

There is absolutely no way you could read this passage

and then say,

'I've read the Bible before

and I know what it says

I believe it  
so I don't need to read it any more."  
There's no way you could interpret Peter as saying that.  
But I've heard Christians says it.

When Peter says  
we need to recall the words of the apostles and prophets,  
it's not for some abstract educational value or something.  
We need to recall the Scriptures  
because false teachers are going to come along  
and try to knock us off our perches.  
We need the memory of God's words to hold us fast  
so we don't lose our own stability. (v18)  
There's a very practical good reason to keep reading your Bible.

Here's a second completely impossible way to apply this passage.  
There is absolutely no way you could read this passage  
and then say,  
"Judgement day is coming  
but there's nothing I can do about it.  
So I'll just live for the present  
and let judgement day take care of itself."  
There's no way you could read this passage and then say that.  
But you know in practice,  
I think that's what most of us in this room do most of the time.  
Sobering isn't it?