

Title: Watching
Date: March 20, 2022
Subject: Watching and waiting for Christ to return means to be active in building his kingdom.
Scripture:

The story is told of a preacher who walked into a bar where he decided to try a shock and awe tactic. He yelled, "Who wants to go to heaven?" The startled patrons reflexively raised their hands...all of them, except for one guy sitting on a stool at the end of the bar. The preacher approached him, and asked: "What's the matter? Don't you want to go to heaven?" They guy responded, "Yeah...sure...but it sounded like you were getting a bus ready to go right now."

Another story. A Bible College professor noticed one of his students had fallen asleep during his lecture. The professor quietly asked the class, "If you want to go to heaven, silently raise your hand." The students complied and raised their hands. Then he noiselessly walked over to the student who was asleep and yelled, "Who wants to go to hell?" The dozing student instantly roused from his slumber and jumped to his feet. After looking around to assess the situation he said, "I'm not sure what we're voting on professor, but it looks like you and me are the only two in favor of it."

Jesus used stories (parables) in his teaching about the future, more specifically about how to live in anticipation of his coming. He spoke of the master returning from a far country, the presence of deceivers, preliminary signs of his coming, keeping lamps burning, being faithful and wise servants, being alert, if the homeowner had known when the thief was coming he would have been ready, watch and pray, the reward for being ready, serving as we watch and wait.

Most of us hate waiting. Computer scientist Ramesh Sitaraman concludes that few things "inspire universal frustration and ire" as waiting for web browsers to load. His research found most people are willing to wait for online videos to load an average of two seconds. After 5 seconds, 25% abandon the attempt. After 10 seconds 50% quit. Impatience?

Waiting and watching for Jesus to return requires patience and active service.

Please turn again to 2 Peter chapter 3. We'll begin near the center of the chapter where we find the idea of anticipation and watching for Christ to return.

I. Look forward. 3:12 – 14

This message is built on the back of last week's when the subject was heaven. The Scriptures and songs on last week's insert can help us look forward. Did you read and listen to some?

"Looking forward" is the key to the passage. It's given three times in 3 verses - 12, 13, 14. The apostle Paul lived in anticipation of what the future held. He expressed his approach this way: "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). He was waiting and watching for Jesus to return. Anticipation should have an impact on how we live each day.

II. Be on guard. V. 17

The call is for us to be awake and alert. A German bank employee was transferring money into a customer's account when he fell asleep with his finger on the "2" key. This resulted in 222 million euros (\$300 million) going into the customer's account. The mistake was caught and corrected before damage had been done to the bank, but the employee was fired along with a colleague who had verified the transfer.

We need to remain spiritually awake and watch.

The early part of the chapter detailed one of the reasons - the presence of deceivers and scoffers who will mock the promise of Christ's coming. They think: "The universe is stable and unchanging which operates by detectable patterns and scientifically proven principles. Nothing has changed since the beginning. Day follows night which follows day which follows night. It's preposterous to think the whole order of the universe will be obliterated by a "loving" God. If it hasn't happened in the last almost 2000 years, it ain't never, ever gonna happen. It's the same old story of promises made and promises forgotten. Just empty words." To the scoffers the idea of Christ coming back is just another myth they desire to dismiss.

God has Peter go back to beginning to show the universe has not always experienced the present order. There was a time when there was nothing. We accept biblical creation as the best explanation for what we see. God spoke and created an orderly world, solar system, galaxy, and universe. God made something with an immense amount of intricate design all around us that clearly speaks to a master designer and not the product of random time and chance. Because of the built-in principles, people can travel to the moon and back, land spacecrafts on asteroids 200,000,000 miles away (Osiris-Rex on Bennu on 10/20/20). We can walk outside and not be squashed by atmospheric pressure which suddenly is 1000 times greater than normal.

Since the beginning, life has not always gone on "same old, same old." There have been times when the Lord intervened and shook up the "normalcy." Almost every culture in the world has a story of a flood which devastated the earth. If every culture has it, there must be some basis for it. It couldn't just be a coincidence.

Leading up to the flood, there were a lot of people who doubted for hundreds of years that there was such a thing as rain. "What's rain? It's never rained. It's never going to rain. It can't and won't happen." And then it rained and rained and rained. They were unpleasantly surprised.

God spoke the world into existence and created the flood. The same word of God is reserving the present heavens and earth for the day of judgment and the destruction of ungodly people.

Jesus spoke a lot about deceivers. He said some would claim they were the Christ or that the Christ could be found out in the desert or some remote place. He said don't believe them because his return is going to be personal and visible to all.

The upshot is to be on our guard. Don't be carried away by the error of false teaching. This means we need to know, be thoroughly acquainted with and place our trust in what the Word of God teaches. We may

not understand it all. There certainly are some tough passages including those that speak about what happens to those who aren't watching and aren't ready even though they seem to be Christ followers.

We shouldn't take the falling from the secure position to mean people who've placed their trust in Jesus Christ as Savior will lose their salvation because they aren't completely ready, aren't foaming at the mouth with anticipation of Christ coming back. It's more about people being swayed by false teachers so they become wishy washy in their living out what it means to be a Christ follower. It's like Peter who lost his footing in his confidence in Christ and slipped when he was walking on the water and later when he denied Christ.

The desired result is stability and faithfulness. Jesus warned of the opposite: "being weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life" (Luke 21:34).

III. The call for right living. vv. 11, 14

The great thing about what God expects from us is that we don't have to guess. We don't wander around, scratch our heads and, kick at the dirt, look up at the sky and think, "Oh I wish we knew what to do." God tells us how to live. This is tied to the removal of the impermanent.

NASA recently deployed the James Webb Space Telescope 1,000,000 miles from earth. It took 40,000,000 people hours to build at a cost of \$10 billion. It's so powerful it would be able to detect the heat of a bumblebee on the moon. NASA explains it's mission: "the world's premier space science observatory... will help solve mysteries in our solar system, look beyond to distant worlds around other stars, and probe the mysterious structures and origins of our universe and our place in it...Webb will gaze into the epoch when the very first stars and galaxies formed, over 13.5 billion years ago. It can observe all of the cosmos, from planets to stars to nebulae to galaxies and beyond – helping scientists uncover secrets of the distant universe as well as exoplanets closer to home."

Though I disagree with their assessment of the age of the universe and they're looking in the wrong place to discover the secrets of the universe, being able to see a greater distance than previously is pretty impressive stuff.

But one day everything the Webb could possibly see...will be gone. READ v. 10. Everything from the farthest galaxy GN-z11 to whatever is in the opposite extent of the universe will be wiped out in a moment.

How are we to live in the light of the coming destruction? It doesn't mean act like groups from the past who quit their jobs, sold their belongings, made or bought clothes that are white, went outside their city, sat on a hill and stared up into the sky because they believed Jesus was returning on a certain day. Rather waiting and watching involve activity.

READ v. 11. Because of God's plan for the heavens and earth, we're to devote our lives to what will last. We're to live holy and godly lives. Holy means set apart from acts, attitudes and thoughts of rebellion against God. It also means set apart to following God's principles, standards and demands on our lives. Godliness is striving to follow God.

Uncertainty of how much time we have left should lead us to living the way God wants.

For more insight we can go back to the opening verses of the chapter. Peter reminds the readers he's written before about these things and it doesn't bother him to give another reminder to stimulate us. The purpose is that important. We are to engage in wholesome thinking and recall the words spoken in the past by God's holy prophets and the commands given by Jesus. Wholesome thinking has been described by Michael Green as "uncontaminated by the seductive influences of the senses." It means we don't give in to the ways of the world system opposed to God with its emphasis on pleasure and denial of God.

We're to recall, take to heart and action, the words that came from God through the ancient Jewish prophets. We're to do the same with the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth which has been revealed by people who knew him. We're to think of things that are right, true, beautiful and appropriate for Christ followers.

In v. 14, the command is to "make every effort." It means to be zealous and energetically engaged in conforming our attitudes, minds and behavior to the Lord's ways. We're to focus our mental faculties, our physical abilities and psychological makeup on the task. We're to be engaged in those things that lead to being found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. It's the process of continuing to work out our salvation. We aren't already perfect. We're to make it our business, our job, our priority.

The fulfillment will occur in heaven. That's where we'll be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. There's also an impact while we're on earth. As children of God who are living in a warped and crooked generation, we'll be able to shine among them like stars in the sky (Philippians 2:15).

IV. Speed Christ's coming. V. 12

This is accomplished in several ways. The theme of this passage is by living the way God intends we somehow are able to bring closer the coming of Jesus Christ. I don't pretend to understand all this means or how it's possible. I can tell you one thing it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean the world will get progressively better until humanity reaches a combined goodness where it's now safe for Jesus to return.

A second way to speed Christ's coming is bringing more people to Jesus Christ as their Savior. "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14).

God is patient and he wants people, all people to be with him forever in heaven. He knows that won't happen because many don't and won't place their trust in him. They'll be surprised as if a thief had come and stolen away their opportunity.

Thieves don't call ahead for an appointment? "Hello Mr. Birr. My name is... well I'm not going to give you my name. That's not important. What is important is I'm a thief and I'd like to rob your house. When can we fit it in? I'll be on a cruise the April 6th through the 10th, so I was wondering if we could schedule the robbery for the night of the 11th. That would give me a day to recover from the cruise and I'll be needing cash again." They don't do it that way. They want the element of surprise which is crucial in preventing the home owner from being ready. The day of the Lord will come like a thief and will surprise many people.

Followers of Christ are clued in, know the Lord is going to return and can be prepared. We are also to help others be prepared by communicating what we know about people come be rightly related to God.

V. Grow. v. 18

This is the summation of the teaching of being prepared for Christ's second coming. It's the focus of 2 Peter and of the entire Bible. It's the end goal of our Christian lives. We are to grow in grace. This is in character, to be and act more like the children of God.

We're to grow in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We're to know him more better. That's not putting it in proper English grammar, but it helps drive home the point. We are to know more about Him, the mental aspect – the facts, information. We're to know him better, the experiential and relational. We're to dive deeper into knowing Jesus the person. We're to seek to understand his character, his mission, his commands, everything there is to know about him. We could think of it in terms of vetting Jesus.

Candidates for important political offices and nominees for Supreme Court go through a vetting process. The purpose is to check out the person, who they are, what they believe, their background, so people can get a full picture. We vet Jesus.

We are to grow, not be content with our present state and condition. Someone has said "the best precaution against being infected by false teachers and carried away by them is to be making spiritual progress."

Christianity can be compared to riding a bicycle. It's very difficult to balance a bicycle when it's stationary. It's much easier to balance one that's moving forward. The same thing is true in the Christian life. We need to keep moving or we're putting ourselves in a position where it's easier to fall. Go and grow.

Professional athletes don't have much of an offseason. After their season is done, they may take a break and go on vacation someplace, but it's not very long before they get back into the routine of workouts, strength training, and conditioning. They know if they take time off, even a day off, they feel like they're lacking in something, losing some of their ability, losing their competitive edge.

As followers of Christ, we can't afford to take time off.

Growth is a community activity. The command isn't given to one person. Even though we are individually responsible for doing our part and contributing, it's about the total group growing. And the only way the total can grow is by each individual growing. A companion Scripture puts it this way: "Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Keep on keeping on in doing so more and more.

Jean has a friend, Mark Ellis, whom she's known since high school. He's a missionary in Brazil. He recently went to the doctor for a checkup. The doctor informed him his cholesterol was 100% above normal. His triglycerides were 98% above normal. He asked the doctor what he needed to do. The doctor said he would need to cut out meat, bread, desserts, etc. Mark asked what was left to eat. The doctor told him fruits and vegetables, etc. Mark thought for a moment and then responded, "Come quickly Lord Jesus."

Whatever it takes to look forward. Whatever it takes.