

Monday 22 September at 7.30 pm  
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## NEAC Bible Reading

### The Context for Mission

#### Bible Reading 3 for NEAC

### Living in the Light of Christ's Return (2 Peter 3:8-18)

Over the last two Bible readings we have seen something of the context for mission as the apostle Peter saw it. The glorious Gospel he spelled out so succinctly in the first 11 verses must always be remembered for it energises our ministries and keeps us from being ineffectual or unfruitful, and helps us ward off false teaching.

But the context for our mission, also means encountering false teachers. They will attack certain specific teachings, but we must also see how behind those attacks lies a distrust of the truth of Scripture and even a denial of the sovereign Lordship of Christ. So as we begin let me pick up that point as I said I would.

#### **{{The false teachers deny Jesus as Lord.**

Peter makes the point clearly in 2:1. These people will *secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them (ESV 2:1)*

The sovereign Lordship of Christ is a key doctrine for Peter which comes through in a number of ways here.

#### **{{“Master” -despotes — the one who commands.**

He talks of the false teachers denying the Master, the despotes. But this is not just any master, it is the one who died for them, who ‘bought them’. This is the crucified Lord they deny, and yet his Lordship ironically is going to be seen in the ‘swift destruction’ they bring on themselves.

#### **{{They refuse to obey**

The use of this word ‘Master’ here suggests Lordship specially with the sense of one who commands. And as we come in a moment to ch 3, we see that one of the things that differentiates Christians and others is how they regard the commandments of the Lord and Saviour (3:2). This word for ‘Master’ is a word only used four other times in Scripture of Christ and always refers to his commanding authority. Their denial of Christ’s Lordship here has in mind their behaviour which Peter goes on to describe in ch 2, but it also describes their teachings, for they secretly introduce ‘destructive heresies’.

That this denial of Lordship is serious comes through here and in ch 3 where they ‘deliberately forget’ (v 5) the power of God’s creative and judging word.

The opposite of this denial is spelled out through the epistle by Peter with his lovely full description for Christ which is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. He speaks of ‘Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’. It’s there in 1:11; 2:20 and 3:18. He also uses ‘God and Saviour Jesus Christ’ in 1:1 and twice he uses the more common New Testament title of Lord Jesus Christ.

For Peter, Jesus is the Sovereign King and Judge and Saviour, the glorified King he had seen in the Transfiguration, and that is why he is to be worshipped and obeyed and why his word can be trusted.

The denial of the prophetic word, their deliberate overlooking of God’s power, and their refusal to acknowledge the return in power and glory of Christ as Scripture and the apostles have taught, leads inevitably to a denial of Christ as Master and Lord.

So let's turn to ch 3 —

**1. A Legitimate Question? — “When is he coming?”**

Over the years I have often heard people who are either new to the Christian faith or just interested to find out more ask the question in v 4.

**“Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” (3:4 ESV)**

Of course, in this context, it is not a genuine question but one that comes from the false teachers and ‘scoffers’ as they’re called in v 3. Peter brings us back to the issue he addressed in ch 1. And as he writes to encourage and stir up the sincere mind of these beloved believers (v 1) he asks us to consider three things. First, Peter stirs up the believers to

**2. Peter stirs up the believers**

**a) Consider the words of Scripture and of Christ (vv1-2)**

Peter talks of this letter and a previous one, perhaps what we know of as 1 Peter, though not necessarily so, and he again says that he has written these to ‘remind’ them in order **“to stimulate them to sincere or wholesome thinking”**. Peter wants these Christians to develop what the American side of my family would call a ‘mind set’ — a whole way of thinking and living. The Christian faith is not just an assent to a body of doctrine, nor is it just about nice feelings of a new relationship with Jesus. It is so much more than that. It involves developing a godly framework of thinking and living and this, he tells us in v 2, is built on recalling, going over, remembering Scripture, the predictions of the prophets, and the command of Jesus himself. The ‘command’ of Jesus that Peter refers to is concerned with Jesus’ teaching, and command, specially concerning our ethics and behaviour in the last days.

The heretics may ‘scoff’, and he comes back to that in vv3-4, but our duty first and foremost is to develop a mindset not formed out of cynicism or doubt, not pulled away from the truth by such false teachers but guided and governed by Scripture and by Christ himself whose word comes to us ‘through your apostles’. What the apostles have passed on is the word of Christ.

Secondly, he stirs up his readers by calling on them to

**b) Consider who God is (v 5-7)**

**i) He is the creator and judge.**

While false teachers deliberately forget that God is the one who created the heavens and the earth and he is the one who has made this promise of Christ’s coming, Christians should remember. God’s the one who judged the earth with the flood in the days of Noah.

Peter’s point here is simple but profound: just remember who made the promise! The one who by his Word created the world from the parting of waters (Gen 1:6) is the God who at his Word judged the world by water in the days of Noah. He is the creator and has already shown he is judge. Then, consider who God is. V 8 —

**ii) He is not like us!**

***But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. (3:8)***

God does not figure time in the way we do. That is not to say there is no present or future for God. It’s not to say that somehow time doesn’t exist for God for he created it, after all. But it is to say, that our tiny minds are unlikely to count time as long or short in the way God does.

God will keep his promises at some date into the future. So Peter insists that we shouldn’t worry about the delay in spite of the ridicule of false teachers, because this great creator God who himself created time is the one who has made the promise that Christ will return and return he will.

c) **Consider God's great Patience (v 9)**

The third way Peter stirs up his readers is by way of enormous comfort and challenge. Why does God delay in sending his Son a second time to judge and to save? While a cynical question on the lips of false teachers, it is a genuine question on the lips of believers. Peter's answer gives us a key to the whole Bible and to God's dealings with human beings down over the centuries. Look at the whole of v 9:

***The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (v 9)***

Here is the wonderful and loving God Christians believe in and the one we have preached about for centuries. And surely this is the God we want our church and our nation to hear about. Here we see the mission heart of God. He is a loving God who has not sent Jesus yet to bring an end to this world order, because he is patient with us, not wanting anyone to perish, but rather wanting everyone to come to repentance.

Here is the love of the Lord expressed so clearly to us. Yes, Jesus will return and he will return at some time in the future to save and to judge, and Peter doesn't want us to lose sight of that. Verse 10 —

***But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. (v10)***

There won't be any escaping that day. It *will* come. But what Peter wants us to know today is that the Lord in his love is being patient. He is giving time for repentance. This is the Gospel. There is time and opportunity to repent of sin, to turn to Christ and to receive forgiveness and mercy from the God of all creation, the one who always keeps his word.

4. **A Christian Mind-Set (vv 11-18)**

Peter has argued for the truth of the teaching that Christ will return and shown how it must drive our thinking. Hence in v 11 he asks —

***“what kind of people ought you to be?”*** His answer is given by way of three commands. The first is indicated there in v 11 —

a) **Live holy and godly lives in joyful anticipation of the coming**

There is no fear for Christians who await the Lord's return. V 12 We look forward to it and pray for it and anticipate the glorious day. But more than that. As we live these godly lives so we play a part in hastening the coming of that day.

Conversion and the creation of a holy people for himself and to his glory is God's purpose while this earth lasts. As we join that people, so in a remarkable way we are being told that Christ's coming approaches.

In Acts 3:19-20 Peter said something similar —

***Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and so that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you --even Jesus.***

Peter is saying, look if you want Christ to return then you need to be the holy and godly people he has called you to be. We have already seen that a danger in our modern church is that we rarely talk of holiness or godliness and are often indistinguishable from everyone else. Another danger is that we are so pre-occupied with our life and world that the second coming has become a dry doctrine to be remembered at Advent, rather than a rousing and stirring-up reminder of God's missionary heart that we should share.

Rather than being products of a counter-culture, a biblical/Jesus culture, rather than being seen to have a radically different mind-set, rather than hastening the day of the Lord,

we often seem more to be products of the culture around us. Peter makes the same point again in v 14:

***So then, beloved, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. (3:14)***

His summary is there in v 15 — what tremendous words!

***Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation...***

Well, we pass over Peter's lovely comment on Paul's writing, let's just note that already some of Paul's letters were being treated as Scripture and thus fully the trustworthy word of God

But Peter then returns to his main subject. What kind of people? ...

***b) Hold fast to the truth, and be on your guard.***

***Therefore, beloved, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless people and fall from your secure position. (v 17)***

When Peter mentions here the 'error of lawless people', he is thinking again of those who have not remembered or followed the commandment of the Lord, people who have been disobedient to Christ.

Yet again then as Peter draws to a close he asks us to remember that any one of us can be led astray. Being on your guard means constantly remembering these things as Peter puts it.

And finally Peter draws it all together v 18. What kind of people? People who

***c) Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.***

In the Christian faith we come to know God in the first place by grace. But all subsequent growth in the Christian life is also by grace, by God's continuing gracious work in our lives through the power of his Spirit. He has given us 'his divine power'. Growing as Christians and maturing in the faith is about finding God at work within us and following him and remembering the Gospel day by day in such a way that we begin to conform more and more to the likeness of Jesus himself.

Growth in *knowledge* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ looks to our coming to an ever deepening relationship with Christ and ever deeper appreciation of who he is and what he has done for us and how wonderful are his promises. Herein lies our Christian joy, but here also lies our defence against the false teachers.

I wonder as we go away from this Congress whether we shall go away with a renewed intention to look at ourselves and guard ourselves in the face of false teaching. Will we simply go away with the same views we came with, or will we go away encouraged by Peter and by each other to look again at the context of our mission and so rejoice more fully and more openly and more evangelistically in the Gospel that is ours? And will we go away determined to keep guarding ourselves and examining ourselves to see that we hold still more strongly than before to the utter trustworthiness of Scripture as the word of God. Will we ask ourselves again whether we trust fully in the total sovereign power of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

May we all grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, to whom be the glory both now and to that wonderful day of eternity.