

GROW!

Trinity Presbyterian Church

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2 Peter 3:14-18

As we wind up our journey through Second Peter that we started in July last year, we arrive at the last few verses of 2 Peter 3. Peter's first letter was addressed to the first century Christians dispersed because of wide-spread persecution. Peter was encouraging them to hang tight. To stand strong in the face of persecution and the temptation to turn away from the faith to blend in with the pagan culture. A temptation that is still strong in our world today.

A few years later Peter wrote a second letter to the early Christian church. In 2 Peter, the apostle encourages Christians to be **counted** as strong in the true faith against the false teachers who were twisting the Scriptures to support their own agenda. We face that today, too, with some of the false teaching on TV and the internet. It is very easy to look for quick answers on the internet and to by-pass the more **diligent** process of actually studying God's Word and listening to preachers and teachers who faithfully expound the Word. But we must be grounded in, anchored to, the Bible. It is our only authoritative source of knowledge to **grow** in our walk with Jesus.

What's one of your least favorite things to do? Get a root canal? Drive in heavy traffic? Wash the windows in your house? Clean the toilet? I'm sure among our top-ten least favorite things is waiting! Especially when you don't know how long you're going to have to wait! Waiting loomed large in our last look at 2 Peter chapter 3 – **diligently** waiting for the day of God and **growing** in patience as we wait for the new heaven and earth. Today we are still waiting. In verse 14 Peter refers back to verse 13 in the previous paragraph with "therefore" – since we are waiting for the new heaven and new earth, we must be ready, **counting** on Jesus' certain return.

Since Jesus' return is certain, believers must be ready. (v 14a)

While Jesus' return is not mentioned explicitly in these verses, the reference to the day of God and the new heaven and earth are key to our **growing** understanding of Jesus' return. Consider these verses:

Matthew 24:44 – tells us the Son of Man is coming at an hour we do not expect. Who is the Son of Man? That is Jesus' favorite title for Himself. Jesus ushers in that great day of the Lord. The end of the world as we know it. The judgment of all who have rejected the Christ. And the glorification of all those chosen by God to live with Him forever.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 – Speaks of the Lord descending with a cry of command. Who is the Lord who is coming with a shout and myriads of angels? It is none other than Jesus as we see in Philippians 2:10-11. He comes to judge and to make all things new.

Revelation 21:1-6a – Speaks of a new heaven and new earth. Who is the husband of the bride (the church)? What is the name of Jesus that shows us that He is God dwelling among us? Emmanuel! Who sits on the throne? Yes, God the Father, but also Jesus the Son of God. Who is identified as the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last? Jesus identifies Himself as the Alpha and Omega in Revelation 22:13.

Jesus is clearly the one who ushers in the new heaven and new earth when He comes again to judge the world and make all things new. The passages we have just read are not unique in Scripture. The whole Bible story from Genesis to Revelation is about God's plan to save His people through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ. We celebrate His first advent at Christmas when God took on flesh and was born to Mary to live among us for a time until His redemptive work was finished on the cross and declared complete by the Holy Spirit upon His

resurrection. Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven before the astonished eyes of His disciples. He is there now at the right hand of God the Father almighty interceding for us. But He's coming again!

Now in **growing** anticipation we **diligently** await Jesus' coming back to complete His restoration work, making all things new, locking away Satan and his devils and all those who refused to bow the knee to Jesus – and completing the glorification of all those who have **counted** on Jesus for forgiveness and cleansing. Oh, what a day that will be!

So, how do we get ready for that great and glorious day? We are going to explore what God has told us through Peter's second letter to the Christians of the first century AD – and to us today. Peter tells us we must be **diligent** in purity and peace, we must **count** God's patience as salvation, and we must **grow** in grace and knowledge.

Diligent, count, and grow. We'll explore these 3 words and their associated phrases to see how we must be ready for Christ's return. Only righteousness is found in the new heaven and earth so it is imperative for believers to live righteously.

Diligence in verse 14 urges readiness for Christ's return and the new heavens and earth. So first, what exactly is diligence? These words help us understand more deeply what **diligence** is: careful, steady, persistent, earnest and eager effort in completing a task. That's a pretty high standard! Students, how careful, steady, persistent and eager are you in completing your school assignments? Any of us in our professional roles – do we consistently do careful and steady effort to complete our tasks eagerly? Sometimes we get pressed on time and we tend to cut corners. Or maybe we feel like nobody really cares or pays attention so we just aren't as careful as we could be.

In our daily walk with Jesus, we must be living set-apart-to-God lives as we await His return. So in this context, **diligence is persistent Holy Spirit enabled effort fueled by end-times hope.** As God's pilgrim people, we are formed by decisive, **diligent** obedience. To what end?

When Jesus comes again, we want to be found by Him without spot or blemish and at peace. This isn't talking about pimples or warts or other physical blemishes. Jesus' Kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, so reference to spots or blemishes refer to what we believe, how we live out our understanding of Scripture – our spiritual lives. In other words, doctrinal purity, mutual love in the body of Christ, **diligent** engagement with the biblical text as opposed to mindless tradition.

When Jesus comes again, he is coming to judge the whole world. The word "found" in verse 14 is a clear reference to judgment. In Genesis 3, how were Adam and Eve found? Do you think they were happy to be found by God in their having just sinned condition? When Jesus returns he will find us in one of 2 conditions – spotless and unblemished – or spotted and blemished – like the false teachers in 2 Peter 2:13 who were called blots and blemishes. Not complimentary adjectives!

Peter shows us in 1 Peter 1:19 what perfection looks like when he says that Jesus on the cross was like a lamb without blemish or spot. Jesus was marred physically almost beyond recognition, yet He was without spot or blemish in His perfect spirit.

We know we will never, this side of heaven, be without spot or blemish in the same way Jesus was, so when Peter says we must be diligent to be found without spot or blemish, he is not referring to sinlessness, rather being free from the depravity of habitual sin. The kind of sin that permeates our thoughts and attitudes. Sin that defines who we are.

There must be an intimate connection between doctrine and life. We have not properly understood doctrine if our lives are not affected by it. Only Jesus' righteousness imputed to, credited to, our "account" through justification applied through faith will secure our entry into the new heaven/earth. *"False teachers stain the bride of Christ with their corruption. True believers are to pursue the kind of purity that adorns the bride of Christ."* (TableTalk Aug. 20, 2026 p.50)

The peace to which Peter refers is, according to *TableTalk* on page 50 of the August edition – “*the settled assurance that frees us to pursue holiness without the paralyzing fear that a single misstep will undo our salvation. Our standing before God rests on Christ’s righteousness imputed to us, not our own moral performance.*” (TT Aug. 20, p.50)

So what will being found without spot or blemish and at peace look like in your life? When Jesus returns, how will he find you? Will He find your relationships God-honoring, pure, suffused in mutual love and respect whether those relationships are in school, at home, at work, or in the community? Will He find you in earnest, eager, disciplined study of His Word? Will he find you **diligently** mentoring younger believers, pursuing holiness with urgency, energetically obeying Him rooted in grace and compassion? Will He find you **at peace** that “is not the complacency that ignores sin, but the settled confidence that our Redeemer holds us fast even as we press forward in obedience?” (TT Aug. 20, p. 50) How will Jesus find you when He returns?

Jesus is most certainly coming back. How must we make ourselves ready for his return? We must be diligent to be found without spot or blemish and at peace.

Verses 15 and 16 tell us that we must also **count His patience** as salvation in apparently delaying His return until the full number of the elect is complete. This needs some unpacking before we can apply it to our lives. And apply it we must for ALL God’s Word is profitable for correction, reproof and training in righteousness!

First of all, the word “count” as used here carries the meaning of thinking, considering, holding in high esteem, leading the way. We hold in high esteem God’s patience as He brings into His Kingdom the elect from every tribe and nation. We submit to His leading the way in this because we see in His infallible Word His promises to save all those whom He has chosen. Consider these promises:

Genesis 12:3 – “...in you (Abraham) all the families of the earth will be blessed.” Clear back at the beginning, God is promising that all kinds of people will be blessed by the salvation that will come through Abraham’s line.

Isaiah 49:6 – Isaiah prophesies of Jesus that “I will make you as a light for the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

Revelation 5:9 – of Jesus the living creatures sing, “*Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.*”

Further, God has commissioned US, His present day disciples, to go into all the world making disciples. That great commission is not just for Jesus’ disciples 2000 years ago, but retains its commanding power to the present day, for Jesus further promised that He would be with us always even to the end of the age.

We are often reminded that our timetable is not God’s timetable. How many times have you prayed for some specific thing to happen and then are saddened when God seems not to answer? But we know that God always answers our prayers – according to His perfect will and according to His timetable. So His answer might be NO. His answer might be YES, just as we asked. His answer might be WAIT, it’s not my time for that yet. So we continue praying for salvation counting His patience as salvation for those who have not yet responded.

Keep praying for that unbelieving son or daughter. Keep praying for that neighbor or colleague at work. Keep praying for their salvation knowing that God will never leave behind one He has chosen to spend eternity with Him.

And as you pray, take every opportunity to proclaim in actions, attitudes, and words the gospel truth of the danger of refusing God’s invitation – no, His command – to repent and be saved and the gospel hope of eternal life through trusting Jesus.

Peter does something interesting and significant in these 2 verses. TableTalk magazine in the devotional reading for August 21 just last month says, *"In just 2 verses, Peter accomplishes something of enormous theological significance: He places Paul's letters on the same level as 'the other Scriptures.' This is an early and authoritative recognition that Paul's writings are not merely human correspondence, but divinely inspired Scripture, carrying the full authority of God's Word."* (end quote)

Paul says some difficult things in his writings. Things that many are prone to discount as only culturally relevant to his day or a result of his own prejudices. But if, as Peter asserts, Paul's writing is just as inspired as the rest of Scripture, then we must take his words as from God himself – as the rest of Scripture that is inspired and infallible. Yes, the various authors of Scripture wrote in their own cultural context using their own language understood by the people of their day, so all of Scripture requires an eye to the cultural context of the day in which it was written as well as understanding the original languages to capture the true meaning and intent of each passage. But it is all breathed out by God, through human authors with its translation and transmission superintended by God Himself. We must handle the Word of God with great care.

So what do we do with these 2 verses (15 and 16)? How do we apply this to our understanding of God's Word and the living out of that understanding in our everyday lives? As we count, that is rightly consider or think about, God's patience in bringing ALL His chosen ones into the Kingdom, we must guard against despair thinking that He has forgotten us. We must guard against careless living thinking the day of judgment is so far in the future that it doesn't apply to us. Remember, Jesus said that His coming will be like a thief in the night. We must be ready at all times. And how are we to be ready? By diligently working to be found without spot or blemish and at peace and by counting God's apparent delay as salvation for those who are yet to respond to His gospel invitation. That readiness, counting, considering will work itself out in how we study God's Word to understand and live it out as it shapes our hearts, attitudes, love for God and neighbor as a way of showing reverence for God and His Word. We don't wait passively for Jesus' return.

So, as we wait eagerly, expectantly, and diligently full of hope and confidence based on God's faithfulness to His promises, how else are we to be ready for Jesus' certain return?

Verses 17 to 18 show us that we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The "therefore" in verse 17 refers us back to the warning of those who twist the Scriptures to their own ends. We must approach God's Word with reverence, prayerfully, carefully, and humbly in order to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord. Lack of study or careless study will stunt our growth or even lead us astray.

It's interesting that "grow" is stated in the imperative form. Usually, we remark that somebody or something is growing – an observation. Or we use the phrase "Grow up!" obviously a command. But here in verse 18 it is simply GROW.

Growth implies an increase or becoming greater. Growth in our spiritual walk is key to our working out or expressing our salvation. Again, from last month's issue of TableTalk, we read "This single imperative captures the whole of the Christian life." TT.p.51

All parents desire to see their children grow in stature, understanding and ability. We, as followers of Jesus, are to become more like Him as we mature in the faith. Growing in trust, faith, love, and joy. Growing in our love for God and for our fellow man. Growing in our concern for the salvation of others. Growing in the expression of the fruit of the Spirit. Growing in our desire to have more Spirit-enabled control over our sin nature, to recognize and turn our backs on the sin that so easily entangles us.

And as we grow, God will use us more to grow His Kingdom. He will speak through us, through the beauty of Jesus seen in us, to draw others to Himself. As the gospel spreads through our faithful living and speaking, God's Kingdom spreads. God will use our growth in His sovereign work to grow His Kingdom.

Every farmer knows that for the crops to grow, there must be soil, water and light. Our spiritual growth depends, too, on being grounded in the Word, nourished by the sacraments, and in communication with God through prayer – the means of grace by which we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What will growth look like in your life? What might need to change in order for your spiritual growth to move closer to maturity, becoming more like Jesus? In the context of this passage in 2 Peter, grow is an imperative. We recognize that growth is God's work. Just as farmers plant the seed, but God brings the growth, so in our spiritual lives, we recognize that God brings the growth, but we must be active participants desiring the growth, putting ourselves in the way of hearing Christ-centered preaching, being on our knees in prayer, participating in the sacraments. We must be daily in God's Word reading, thinking about, studying. We must be in the fellowship of the saints where we can encourage and sharpen each other. AS we grow in our love of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – we will grow in our thirst to know Him more.

Remember the parable of the mustard seed? One of the smallest seeds, yet when full grown, the birds can nest in its branches. What starts out insignificantly can, under God's hand, fill the earth.

How can we be ready for Jesus' sure and sudden return? We must be diligent to be found without spot or blemish and at peace. We must remember that God's timeframe is not like ours and count his patience as salvation for those who have not yet responded to the gospel. And we must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

TableTalk magazine had several devotions last month based on 2 Peter. On page 51, I read this conclusion: *"The letter ends with glory ascribed to Jesus Christ. Peter's final word is one of worship. Whatever challenges the church may face, the glory belongs to Christ 'both now and to the day of eternity.' That doxology is the ultimate answer to every heresy and the ultimate expression of every truth that Peter has taught."* TT p. 51

My friend, are you ready for Jesus' return? He IS coming back. And He has given us ways to be sure that we are ready. Are you diligent in your life habits to be found without spot or blemish living at peace with God and your neighbor? Are you counting His patience not as negligence on God's part, but as opportunity for your salvation and the salvation of those you love? That means making sure that you are right with God by trusting Jesus and Him alone for forgiveness and eternal hope. It means being verbal about the gospel of Jesus Christ so people HEAR how to be saved. Are you growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ through His Word, frequent participation in the sacraments and fervent prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition?

If you are ready, you can be assured that Jesus will hold you fast.