March 24/25, 2018

Hope Filled Living

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

2 Peter 3:10-18

Pastor Bryan Clark

(Mike Stelzer sings "*Somewhere Over the Rainbow")*

That song was written in 1939. It was written for *The Wizard of Oz,* but actually the song has far outlived the story. For seventy-five years that song has moved one generation after another. The Recording Industry Association of America voted that song number one in their "Songs of the 20th Century." Why is that? I would suggest to you it's because that song taps into something deep within the soul of every person made in the image of God. Every one of us has something deep in our soul that longs for something different, something more. There is something deep within us that cries out and says, "Please tell me this is not all there is. There's got to be something more!"

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us for the final time to 2 Peter. We conclude our series this morning with 2 Peter, Chapter 3. Peter is writing to people whose lives as Christians have become very difficult. They're on the beginning threshold of persecution. Shortly after this letter is penned, both Peter and Paul will be executed by Nero and these people are headed for much more serious persecution. So if you're writing to bring hope to a group of Christians who are heading into the face of real persecution, what do you say? The consistent theme of both 1and 2 Peter has been that we find our hope in the return of Christ and the ushering in of the new heaven and the new earth and the ultimate fulfillment of our salvation. In Chapter 3, verses 8 and 9, which we looked at last week, he reminded us that God is not slow or tardy in His return, but rather He's gracious and merciful, long-suffering and patient, and every day that Jesus waits is one more day that someone can receive His gift of salvation. But do not misinterpret that. It does not mean that Jesus is not coming back. He picks it up then in Verse 10:

> **But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.** (*NASB, 2 Peter 3:10)

So **the day of the Lord** is a phrase taken from the Old Testament prophets, picked up by Jesus, picked up then by Peter regarding the return of Christ and the judgment to follow. Jesus told Peter directly that Jesus **will come as a thief.** Nobody knows the day or hour; suddenly Jesus appears... returns. It says in that day **the heavens will pass away with a roar**. There are several terms in this verse that are disputed, and it's really hard to figure out exactly what is meant**. The heavens** is one of them. What is meant by **the heavens**? Some people think the heavens is a reference to the sky, the clouds, the stars, the moon, the planets, and that's possible; that might be what it is. Others think—and I would be more on this page—that the heavens is a reference to *the spiritual realm*. Right now, today, Jesus literally, bodily, physically dwells somewhere, and He rules from there—and we refer to that as the *spiritual realm*. If you have loved ones that die in Christ, they go to this place. Now we tend to think geographically—like it's *out there* somewhere. I don't think that's too likely. I think it's more likely a different realm—a spiritual realm. There is quite a bit in the Bible that I think would affirm that. But there is coming a day when that separate realm between this earth and the physical, and the spiritual realm will be done away with, and they will come together

where Jesus will literally, physically, bodily rule on this earth, and we'll be together forever. I think that's what he's saying—that division will one day **pass away with a roar**. This is not the roar of a lion. This is a roar like a wind makes. Here in the Midwest we'd say it's the sound a tornado makes when it comes through. **And the elements**—again a very discussed term—probably just the components of all of that **will be destroyed with intense heat and the earth and its works will be burned up**. The **earth** is more obvious; **works** I think is referring to all those towers of Babel that we the people have built. It's our own monument to ourselves and our desire to be our own god. These things will ultimately be wiped out...destroyed...removed in preparation for the restoration and the new heaven and the new earth.

There is a lot of discussion then around that phrase **burned up**. This is the only place in the New Testament it appears, and there is quite a bit of controversy around this. As you know, the English Bible is taken and translated from Greek copies and there is a significant amount of copies and different families of copies, and most scholars today think that the majority of the manuscript evidence used the word that doesn't mean **burned up**. It meant *to be discovered, to be laid bare, to be opened up.* But because a copyist believed that was unclear—that can't be the right word—they think a copyist along the way changed one word and that happens to be the manuscript family that the New American Standard uses. So the word **burned up**—and then it's foot-noted in the margin—could also be *discovered*, which is a completely different word. So I think the manuscript evidence is pretty clear that the intended term that Peter used was a word that meant *to be discovered, to be opened up, to be revealed.* So if you think about a forest fire, you think about all the brush and all the cover the forest fire goes through, and everything is exposed; everything is opened up; everything is visible. Here in our area a lot of people burn their fields. The same thing happens. Everything burns away and the ground is kind of opened up and everything is exposed or revealed. That would be the consistent message of Scripture—that, at the end of the day, everything is laid bare; it's opened up; it's discovered, and it's subject to the judgment of God. There are none of these terms in Peter that mean to be *annihilated*. Whether it's destroyed or passed away, none of these terms mean that, and I think it's important we don't go down that path. Verse 11:

> **Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,**

So if that's true, how should we live? The obvious answer is: if we know, at the end of the day, all of the monuments to ourselves, all of our attempts to build our own kingdom on earth are all going to be destroyed and wiped away, why would we live for that? The answer is, "Well, we shouldn't." We should live **in holy conduct**. The word **holy** means *other than*. We should live *other than* the rest of the world who don't understand that. That phrase **what sort of people** is an interesting phrase. It primarily roots back to the idea of *identifying foreigners in the land*. So someone would ask, "What sort of person is this?" and typically the answer was in reference to where do they come from? Are they Roman; are they Egyptian; are they Jewish? You also had a similar usage of the term when Jesus was on the boat with the disciples in the great storm and Jesus calms the sea and the response of the disciples is, "What sort of man is this?" That exact same phrase—basically asking, "Where does this guy come from?" So you think about in 1 Peter, Peter told us that as children of God, *we are aliens and strangers on this earth because our citizenship is in heaven*. So if that's true and if we know how the story ends, what sort of people ought we to be *other than* the rest of the world?

The idea of **godliness** is one of those abstract, spiritual-sounding terms, but we saw this in chapter 1 in this very practical kind of process of growth that Peter laid out for us. He talked about the

importance of *moral excellence* which is that decision, "I want to be a Christ follower; I want to travel this path," which then is followed by *knowledge*. Knowledge is, "I need to then know what's true," which then leads to *self-control* which leads to *perseverance* which leads to *godliness* which leads to *love*. So godliness is basically living out the truth with self-control and perseverance, and Peter is just rescoring that here in the text. Verse 12:

> …**looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God,** (Vs. 12a)

A very interesting phrase there; **looking for** is like *with great anticipation*...anxiously looking for and waiting. In the New Testament there are three tenses for salvation: past tense, present tense, and future tense—*have been saved, am being saved, will be saved.* I would say, by and large, we as American Christians primarily emphasize the past tense. People talk a lot about, "I *was* saved when I was ten; I *was* saved three years ago." We often talk about it in past tense terms. The term we use the least is future tense, and yet in the New Testament it's the exact opposite. The tense that's used the least is the past by an overwhelming margin. What's used the most is the future tense. If you are persecuted, if you are beat up, if life is really hard for you as a Christian, where do you find your hope? Your hope is not in this world. It's not the idea that things are going to work out and get better. It is understanding that ultimately Jesus is coming back and our salvation will be fulfilled—and that is the hope of the gospel. So that is what Peter is saying and seems to be saying in some way that's kind of hard to understand—that if we're diligent about accomplishing the mission, we can actually *hasten* His return. It's kind of like if you're weary and tired of the pain and suffering of this world, let's be about the mission; let's get the job done and hasten His return. How exactly that works, no one has any idea but it does seem to be what the text is implying.

> …**looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.** (Vs. 12-13)

This is talked about more in Revelation chapters 21 and22—this idea of Jesus returning and ushering in **the new heaven and the new earth**. What kind of a place is it? It's a place where **righteousness** *lives*. It's a place where things are made right again. It's critically important to understand we're not just talking about life after death. We're talking about redemption; we're talking about restoration; we're talking about a place where that which is destroyed by sin and death is returned—it's redeemed; it's made right again!

So there's kind of a core theology around this that we need to talk about a little bit. There are those that believe that at the end of the story the earth is destroyed—annihilated—and God basically creates a new earth and the story goes on from there. It would be my opinion that if that's our theology, we basically are saying that sin and death win *Round One,* but God will win *Round Two*, but I do not believe that is the theology of the New Testament. It is regeneration...rebirth...renewal and restoration. It's a place where things are made right again. When Jesus was talking to his disciples in Matthew chapter 19, he is talking specifically about His return, and He says to His apostles that they will reign with Him when He returns and He says, "You will join Me in the regeneration." When Paul is writing to the Romans in Romans chapter 8, he says, "All creation groans and it awaits the redemption, the renewal of all creation." Creation is not waiting to be annihilated. What would be the hope in that? But rather, instead, the redemption, the restoration, the renewal of the earth as God intended it to be.

It's helpful to think of the terms that Peter just used, the terms used in Revelation 21 and 22, and then the terms used for our salvation. So think about 2 Corinthians 5:17…*therefore if anyone is in Christ, you are a new* (what?) *a new creation. Old things are* (what?) *passed away; all things become* (what?) *new.* All of that language is right here in Peter in referencing the heaven and the earth. Think through the story. When you trusted Christ as Savior, you were not annihilated. You were reborn—it's regeneration. "I'm made new and whole again, and this is a process I'm in to reach its fulfillment—the fulfillment of my salvation at the return of Christ." You have this beautifully illustrated in the resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus arose from the dead, it was His literal, physical, bodily resurrection of the body that He bore on the cross. He even showed the disciples the nail prints in His hands and the scar in His side. It was His resurrected body and we are told that is the *first fruit*—the prototype of our resurrection and the redemption to come. In 1 Corinthians 15 we are told very clearly that when the resurrection happens, it is this body that was placed in the grave that is literally, physically resurrected from the grave. Then it is changed—this mortal puts on immortality! It's this body redeemed and perfected back the way God intended it to be. My body is not annihilated and a new body is created. This body is resurrected and changed. All of that is a picture of the full story of the regeneration, the redemption, the restoration, the renewal of the heavens and the earth in such a way that God says everything that was destroyed by sin and death is made right! As God's ultimate declaration, "I win *Round One*;" "I win *Round Two*." "I win!" That's a core theology of the Scriptures. Even the terms themselves speak of this.

In the Greek language, there are two different words for *new*—new heaven, new earth. One of those words is *kainos* which means qualitatively new. We would probably use the word *renewal*. The other Greek word is *neos*, which is a word that means quantitatively new. We would probably use the phrase *brand new*. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, in 2 Peter, in Revelation 21 and 22, it's always *kainos*. It's not brand new; it's renewed; it's restored; it's redeemed; it's made whole again. When Jesus speaks in Revelation 21 and 22, He says, "*I make all things new*." He doesn't say, "I make all new things." The significance of that is everything that sin and death has taken away from you in this life is ultimately given back and restored. The hope of the gospel is not just life after death; it is so much more comprehensive than that. Verse 14:

> **Therefore,** (so therefore, in light of this) **beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,**

Again, if we know this is true, how shall we live? We should live in **peace**. This is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *shalom*. We should live with our souls flourishing. We should live with a sense of wholeness, a sense of rest, that this world is not the end of the story. This world does not win. What sin and death has done to me does not win. Someday God makes it right and the story is full and complete and whole, and I know that. Therefore it motivates me to live **spotless and blameless**. I'm sure many of us have heard someone say, "Someone is so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good." I would suggest to you I have never in my life, ever met anyone that is so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good. The problem is we're not heavenly minded enough, and that's why we're often no earthly good. It's because we're living for the things of this world. It's because we're building our own kingdom here. It's because we're trying to find our hope in this world, believing somehow it's going to be different; somehow it's going to get better; somehow it's all going to work out. And then when we are deeply disappointed, once again we are discouraged and saddened and in despair, and we lose sight that the hope of the gospel is that Jesus is coming back and He's going to bring **a new heaven and a new earth** and God is going to restore that which has been lost or taken away from us because of sin and death. He goes on to Verse 15:

and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; (in other words one more day for someone today to receive God's gift of salvation) **just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.** (Vs. 15-16)

So basically Peter is saying that his brother Paul wrote about these things. It seems obvious the false teachers were distorting some of Paul's writings. Interestingly enough, even by this time, some of Paul's writings were considered to be Scripture, as Peter identifies them. But clearly Peter is saying some of this is a mystery; it's beyond our ability to figure out and understand, but the false teachers twist it and distort it in order to fulfill their own agenda. So what's his concern? Verse 17:

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,

Basically what Peter just said and what he's been saying is that you have in Christ an unimaginably wondrous future that cannot be taken away or lost. But the false teachers are determined to take it away from you. They're determined to lead you astray and to steal your hope. And what Peter is saying in the final words before he will die is, "Do not let them do that to you!" If you are a Christian here this morning and you are living in despair, someone lied to you! Someone lied to you and they stole your hope. They distracted you from the truth, and the evidence is the despair you're feeling in your heart. Peter's final plea is, "Don't you dare let someone do that to you. Your future is utterly, absolutely magnificent. Don't ever forget that!" He says

...be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (Vs. 17b-18)

He ends with this wonderful doxology of praise to Jesus. In 1 and 2 Peter there has been a very consistent theme. If you're writing to people for whom life is very hard and about to get much more difficult, what do you tell them? What is their source of hope? The source of hope is not to believe that everything is going to work out, that it will all make sense, that if you're a good boy or girl, bad things won't happen to you. The Bible never promises that. But rather it's in the return of Christ! And because your salvation is on the basis of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, granted to you on the basis of His grace and mercy and not your performance, it's as true of you on your worst days as it is on your best days.

Peter started his first letter with a theological foundation. *By the mercy of God, you have been born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, in order to obtain an inheritance that is so sure, it's already reserved in heaven for you. It's an inheritance that can't be lost; it can't be diminished; it can't be corrupted, and it will reach its fulfillment when Jesus returns and ushers in the new heaven and the new earth.* I understand life can be very, very hard. I understand sometimes it's confusing; sometimes it's disappointing; sometimes it's downright brutal! I understand that.

Two weeks ago I stood at the bedside of a young mother. She was unbelievably courageous. So was her husband. She had battled cancer, was in her early 30's, and had four children ages 12 to 2.

But she was coming to the finish line and, in a matter of hours, she would die. We talked about the new heaven and the new earth. What do you tell a mother with four young children that's about to die about hope? It's that everything that her heart longs to experience with her husband and her children will be given back in the redemption. God will make right what has been taken away by sin and death.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, **Oh death, where is your sting? Oh death, where is your victory?** To which Annie Dillard says, "Just about everywhere you look, now that you ask." We feel that deeply! Two hours later Joanne went into the presence of Jesus; her husband Adam is with us this morning. What do we say to give Adam hope? What do we say to give these kids hope? Every day for the rest of their lives they will long for moments with their mom that they will not have on this earth. We remind them, "The story's not over. It's a delay, but everything your soul longs for you will get as God makes right what was taken from you because of sin and death."

This past week I met with a young couple, a wonderful young couple—strong Christians full of faith and courage. But in a couple of weeks she will give birth to a full-term baby that will die. The baby may die in childbirth. They're praying they get a few hours, maybe a few days. That's just brutal...just brutal. And we wish the story was different! What do we say? Where do we find hope in that? The hope is in the promise that one day God will make right what has been taken away by sin and death, that which your soul longs to experience with this child will be realized—just not quite yet, but it is some day.

This past week my wife Patti stood at the bedside of her father with her mom and they watched her dad go to be with Jesus. Death is all around us, and we are reminded this isn't the way God intended it to be. Something deep within us cries out for something more! Some of you here this morning live with pain and suffering every day; some of you with chronic pain or disease—physical ailments that affect your quality of life every single day. I can't help but think of our Worship Pastor Mike. His story touches me deeply. Mike's health is very, very hard. He stands here and sings that beautiful song *(Somewhere over the Rainbow)* and believes it with all his heart. But I'm telling you that life is hard for Mike, Katie and the kids. What Mike would consider a really good day, for the rest of us would be a terrible day health-wise, and that's not going to change. It's not going to get better, barring a miracle from God. We pray and we pray and we pray and it doesn't change. What do we say? "It's all going to work out?" "All things work together for good?" Where do we find our hope? We find our hope in the promise that someday God's going to make this right. What Mike and Katie long to experience together with their kids is going to be limited in many ways in this life, so we just keep remembering the story is not over, and everything that you long for will be realized because the promise is to make right what was taken by sin and death—and one day it will be made right! That's part of the experience of the new heaven and the new earth.

It's unique for each of us. It's related to what was taken and destroyed by sin and death in this life. That will be part of the fulfillment and the joy of the life to come. Some of you live in chronic pain every day. You've forgotten what it would be like to live just one day without severe pain. I understand that journey; I lived around it for over twenty years. It's brutal! For some of you, it's emotional pain. For some of you, it's just the disappointment, the struggle, and the discouragements of life. You think, "I didn't think this is the way it was going to be. Life has not turned out to be what I wanted it to be." Where do we find our hope? We don't find our hope in this world. I can't tell you it's all going to work out. I can't tell you it's going to get better. I can only tell you that God has promised redemption and restoration and renewal, and through His salvation, bringing us to a place where things will be made right again. And I can promise you it will be everything that

your soul longs for. Everything that you so deeply desire today will ultimately be realized. When I know that and believe that, it changes the way I face everything I go through in this life.

This is such a magnificent truth! It's almost hard to get your mind around it. In some ways it's almost incomprehensible! So before we release you back out into the chaos this morning, I just want to give you some time to kind of soak in it, to dwell in it. I would suggest in these moments that you fill your heart with hope again. There is no child of God that needs to walk out these doors this morning without a heart full of hope. Your story is utterly magnificent and your future is beyond your wildest imagination, and it's yours through the death, burial and the resurrection of Jesus. I am going to pray. Molly and Carey are going to play back through that song one more time. It is just a chance to drink it in and fill your heart with the hope of the gospel!

Our Father, we are just really beyond thankful. It's hard to know what to say when we think about what You have done for us. But life can be really, really hard. It's hard because of sin and death, but Jesus conquered sin and death and this story is not over. One day we will experience with You everything that our soul longs for today. God, knowing that, may we live this life as hope filled people. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. What do you believe are the deepest longings of the human heart? What do those longings tell us about what we're made for and the world to come?

2. What causes us, as believers, to lose sight of our hope and get caught up in the despair of our culture?

Bible Study

1. Do a quick review of II Peter 3:8,9. Why has Jesus not returned yet?

2. Read II Peter 3:10-13. The return of Jesus has been the primary focus of Peter in both his letters because it is the basis of our hope as believers.

3. Compare Revelation 21:1-4; 22:1-5. While many if not most Christians want to focus on their charts and timelines of the future, what is the real purpose of knowing how the story ends according to Peter?

4. You've heard it said that some people are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good. Yet Peter would say being truly heavenly minded is the basis for living rightly on earth. Why is that? Why does a clear understanding of the basis for our hope purify our lives now on earth?

5. Read II Peter 3:14-18. What is Peter's concern for us as believers? What will diminish our hope? How does this happen?

6. Read I Peter 1:3-9. This is the foundational theology of Peter that provides the basis for our hope. Review what Peter has said and highlight the main points. Why is it critical we never forget this hope-filled truth?

Application

1. List the top 3 things you learned or were reminded of in our study of I and II Peter.

2. What are some practical ways you can stay focused on the truth and not let the false teachers lead you astray?

3. What one or two things can you do better to reflect hope-filled living?

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