

Looking Forward, Living Faithfully
II Peter 3:11-13

The political dust has not yet settled from this past week's mid-term elections, the effects of which have yet to be seen as new officials take their place at the local, state and federal levels. Regardless of how you voted or who you voted for or what you were in favor of, one thing remains sure and constant – God is in control. The pundits and news anchors can sit back and try to figure this whole thing out over the next number of months in terms of outcomes, but none of them, including conservative and even Christian networks like CBN will be heard on any network claiming God's sovereignty in the whole thing. They'll talk about how one politician should have done this or how that politician reached out more to a particular group. They'll talk about the political platforms or even about character flaws leading one to a victory or another to defeat. They'll talk about the demographics of certain regions and how various ethnic groups, religious groups and age groups voted. How men voted vs. women. And let me remind you that as citizens we have a right, a privilege, and a responsibility to vote, but Scripture is clear God is the one who puts rulers in places of authority while removing others.

But regardless of the political changes and challenges that will unfold over the next several years as a result of this particular election and regardless of your political bent, our passage has a clear message of the how and why we are to live. No matter who is in political authority we have a higher calling from the Ruler of everything. Things may not have gone the way you voted but that shouldn't alter how you live. And let me just add this one more thing, well really two things. The first is the clear mandate from Scripture that we are to pray for those in authority whether we voted for them or not, whether we like their policies or not, whether we agree with them or not.

The second thing is this: and maybe someday this will be a whole other message, but I want to speak to proposal 1 and the legalization of recreational marijuana. To that issue I want to say two things. The first is that the Federal government still considers it a controlled and illegal substance. I still believe that federal law supersedes state law. The second thing I want to say is that just because something is legal doesn't make it moral, doesn't make it right. The dictionary defines recreational as any form of play, amusement or relaxation that refreshes the body and mind. We already have an opioid problem in this nation and we don't need anything that exacerbates that problem by legalizing another drug the FDA considers as a doorway to other more dangerous drugs. This is a Pandora's Box that will impact decisions by the government, law enforcement, and employers and even churches. If you want something that will help you relax in body and mind take up knitting or shuffle board. But I digress, yet it all ties in with the message today from II Peter 3:11-13. How are we to live in light of all that's going on in the world today? Our text gives us three things we should pursue. We are to pursue a path that is wholesome
We are to pursue a purpose that is worthy
We are to pursue a promise that is wonderful

I. WE ARE TO PURSUE A PATH THAT IS
WHOLE SOME – v. 11

The passage begins with the word "since". It's a conjunction linking the context of the previous passage with what is about to be stated. Peter invites us to ponder the events that are going to happen in the future with a question of how we should live now, knowing that the heavens and the earth are going to be destroyed. There is a day coming Peter says that is to be feared. We learned last week that it's called the day of the Lord, a day in which He will pour out His wrath on the world for their rebellion against Him as sovereign ruler and their rejection of His Son and their refusal to accept Jesus as personal Savior. The day of the

Lord is a day reserved for the unbeliever. Now while it is referred to as a day, it is not just a single day but will last many days and is described for us in the book of Revelation. We learned from the Old Testament that it will be a day of great doom, a day of great darkness, and a day of great destruction. It will end, as Revelation tells us, when all unbelievers will be thrown into the Lake of fire where they will spend eternity. This day is different from another day known as the day of Christ. The day of Christ is reserved for believers and will be a day of reward and blessing. There will be a third day we will discuss in a moment called the day of God.

“Since everything will be destroyed in this way,” (in the day of the Lord), “what kind of people ought you to be?” Peter asks a rhetorical question, a question to which we should all know the answer, but just in case it’s a bit hazy on what he means, just in case we aren’t sure, he gives us the answer.

The word “ought” conveys an important meaning in what Peter is stating here. The dictionary defines it in a way that puts the whole context of the passage into perspective. The word means to be compelled by obligation or duty; something that is an expectation. It is not a recommendation or suggestion as if we can think about it and choose whether or not we want to do it. It is an expectation.

We give David a list of chores that need to be done daily, weekly and monthly. These are things he ought to do. If he does them there are rewards. If he doesn’t do them there are consequences. There is a compelling reason to get them done.

Your boss meets with you and says you ought to finish a report by the end of the day or by the end of the week. It’s an expectation or obligation to fulfill.

Posted traffic signs tell us how we ought to drive.

On the rare occasions when I fly, I am glad the pilot does what he ought to and not what he wants to.

In the context of our verse the word is in the present tense, meaning the here and now and refers to an obligation including owing something to someone that we are to do right away without hesitation. Bible scholar Hiebert goes further by stating that it “indicates the abiding obligation resting upon believers to manifest moral maturity as an abiding possession.”

In other words, moral or spiritual maturity is the obligation of every believer. We are to become more like Christ in character every day. There are no excuses or exceptions. It’s not when I feel like it or what I feel like doing. I can’t pick and choose. It’s pursuing the whole kit and caboodle.

Notice the answer Peter gives to his rhetorical question on how we ought to live. He uses the word “ought” a second time to stress the seriousness of the command. “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.”

The first thing we notice is the decree we are given.

A. The Decree We Are Given

In spite of what’s going to happen in the future, live a holy and godly life now. We can become so fixated on something that is down the road that we neglect to pay attention to what’s going on in the here and now. You’re driving down the road and you see a beautiful rainbow way ahead, but neglect to see the vehicle just ahead of you breaking for some debris in the road.

The first decree is in regard to external actions.

1. A decree regarding external actions

We are to be holy. It has to do with daily conduct and what rules our behavior.

God is described and defined as being holy. He is

perfect in every sense. Who He is and what He does stem from His nature which is holy. His actions and attitudes are holy. He will never act in any other way than out of holiness. He is perfect and all together without sin in every way.

In his first letter Peter says that we are to be holy because God is holy (I Peter 1:16). That seems like an impossible task when we consider who He is and know how we are. The great thing though is that we read in Scripture that as a believer, we are declared and viewed by God as holy. Because we are in Christ, He sees us without sin.

The same Greek word can be translated as either holy or saint. It speaks to the believers position before God. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he addressed them as saints. Yet when you read the letter, they were anything but holy or saint like. They were selfish, some immoral, they argued about spiritual gifts and dishonored the Lord's Supper. Still, Paul called them saints because that is what they were before God.

A saint is not someone who has been given a special place or title in church polity because of some spiritual attribute or act. Neither is a saint someone who has attained some level of super spiritual maturity. Anyone and everyone who has, by grace through faith, received Christ as Savior, is a saint in God's eyes. He is clothed in the righteousness of Christ and is viewed by God as holy, or just as if he has not sinned.

The word holy means to be set apart to God. It refers to being set apart from sin and consecrated to God. Just as the utensils in the Tabernacle were set apart for God's service and could not be used for any other purpose, so the Christian, as holy in God's sight, is set apart for God's service.

Romans 12:1

But this word not only refers to my position before God, it also refers to my practice. The word in the Greek can also be translated sanctification and that

is the sense in which Peter is using it here. Holiness encompasses both a divine and human responsibility. God has done His part in declaring me holy and even given what I need to be holy (II Peter 1:3-4). I have a responsibility in which to bring my practice through the help of the Holy Spirit in alignment to my position. Personal or practical holiness is not perfect holiness but is characterized by faith and repentance with the aim of spiritual maturity. It is a desire to become more like Christ in character each day. It is a work of gradual development in Christian character.

Sanctification then refers to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the believer transforming his conduct or character into the character of Christ. In theological terms we call this progressive sanctification. Each day as we yield to the work of God's Spirit in us, we are changed in character to reflect His character.

Tony Evans in his book *Kingdom Man* states that a person who lets God rule on the throne of his heart, will live by fearing God which means that we take Him seriously doing His will not ours. Our actions, our conduct will reflect that we honor and respect Him, not just paying Him lip service. Every day is a day marked by doing our best to mature in character, allowing His Spirit to develop His spiritual fruit in us.

In Paul's letters, he gives us a grocery list of traits that should be evident in the life of a growing believer as well as a list of traits that should become more absent every day.

On Wednesday nights we have been considering the practical side of justification. If God sees us as holy how should that look practically? If there is just one verse that sums up what practical holiness should look like I think it's Galatians 5:16.

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

A second passage appears a few verses later. Galatians 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such there is no law.”

Now if those verses seem somewhat unclear about what practical holiness is Paul writes elsewhere what practical holiness should look like leaving no room for ambiguity or uncertainty.

Ephesians 4:22-5:21 (Don’t read, just mention) Compressed in that lengthy passage is a statement that simply says “don’t grieve the Spirit”. Don’t do anything that will cause the Spirit deep grief. That simply means any sin grieves Him. That passage details many of the sins we are to put off and discard. Then he unfolds what a holy life looks like. It’s a sobering look at spiritual reality and if we are serious about practical holiness we won’t just window shop or see it as a spiritual buffet where we pick and choose what we want, we’ll take inventory and hold our lives up to the mirror of Scripture and start throwing out expired produce. Let David’s prayer be ours.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive (wicked – KJV) way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Psalm 139:23-24
In other words, show me my sin, help me get rid of it so I can become more spiritually mature.

A couple other passages for personal spiritual growth in holiness are Colossians 1:10-14; 3:1-17. In Colossians 1:10 Paul’s prayer is that believers might live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way.

In Colossians 3:2 he exhorts the believer to set his mind on things that are above.

Practical holiness takes God and His Word seriously. Peter gives a decree regarding external actions – how we conduct ourselves before a watching world. It should be markedly different than those who are unbelievers.

A second decree has to do with internal attitudes.

2. A decree regarding internal attitudes

Not only are we to display holiness, we are also to display godliness. What’s the difference you might ask? Where holiness has to do with actions, godliness has to do with attitudes.

We live in a fallen and broken world. It’s messed up. A movie title from the early 1960’s provides a fitting description: “It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World.” Shakespeare wrote in Hamlet “The times are out of joint.” No matter where you look or where you go, temptations lurk. On the TV, what you read, where you shop, school, work, and well it’s all around us. But in spite of all that is luring us to sin the biggest problem isn’t outside us. The biggest problem lies within. It’s in the heart. Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is desperately wicked above all else, who can know it.”

Matthew 12:34-35 “...Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks...the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.”

Matthew 15:18-19 “But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man unclean. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

Our biggest problem isn’t outside, it’s inside. It’s a heart filled with pride. It’s a heart that hasn’t learned to say no to me. It’s a heart that hasn’t learned yet what it is to deny self, take up our cross and follow Christ (Luke 9:23). It’s a heart that hasn’t fully died to self, to our will and fully embraced God’s will, which is to deny self and pursue holiness for Him. That speaks to the devotion we are to have.

B. The Devotion We Are To Have

We are called to follow Christ, to love Him with all we have. In John 14:21 we read that if we love Christ we are to keep/obey/do His commandments. Again it goes back to the word “ought”. That word really boils down to our level of devotion. We obey not out of duty, but devotion; not out of fear of Him but out of faithfulness to Him.

We can wear a thin veneer of spirituality that will in time reveal the transparency of our heart and devotion. Inner attitudes will eventually be revealed by outer actions. Peter has given a decree to be holy and godly, pursuing a path that is wholesome. In verse 12 we are to pursue a purpose that is worthy.

II. WE ARE TO PURSUE A PURPOSE THAT IS WORTHY – v. 12

The world’s systems are crumbling all around us. There is chaos and catastrophe and confusion. People are looking for a worthy purpose. Many look in the wrong places, lured by instant gratification or the promise of something better, some entitlement. They try to find purpose in religion. They try to find purpose in politics. They try to find purpose in a career or a hobby or more knowledge. They clamor for answers and action, but it seems like things are only getting worse. But they haven’t seen anything yet. In spite of the news, in spite of what will happen in the future when the day of the Lord comes in full fury, for the believer there is a forward look with a future longing. Our purpose isn’t found in what we see, it is in what we look forward to.

A. There Is A Forward Look With A Future Longing

We can become so distracted by everything that is immediately happening all around it can be overwhelming and troubling. But as a believer we must look forward. Something better is coming. Looking at all that’s going on and considering the lengthy delay of the Lord’s return can make it

difficult to look ahead. But rest assured something better is coming for the believer. So look forward to it but don’t turn away with a calloused eye from those who are hurting in the here and now. As the saying goes don’t become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. We live today and every day in light of what we are looking forward to.

What is ahead for the believer?

Peter says it’s the day of God.

How is that different from the day of the Lord and the day of Christ?

Like the day of Christ, the day of God is for believers. It is that day which will come after the day of the Lord is completed. It is a day which has eternity in focus. Where the day of the Lord ends in eternal judgement, the day of God begins a time of eternal joy. Where one is a time of punishment and pain, the other is all about eternal praise and pleasure.

One author rightly said that what we are looking forward to will strongly influence what we are living for. What we are looking forward to should not only influence our Christian walk but also Christian witness.

Two passages give us some perspective on looking forward with a future longing. Notice how they cause us to look inward and outward, how they clear our focus to look upward and forward.

I Peter 1:13-16

I John 3:2-3

We look inward at our attitudes.

We look outward at our actions.

We look upward at our example.

We look forward to the day of God.

We look forward to the joy of heaven.

We look forward to the eradication of everything that has been marred by sin and to sin itself.

The penalty of sin was dealt with on the cross. But there is a day we look forward to when the power of sin will have no effect on us, and when the presence

of sin will be absent.

I hope you long for the day of God, a day Peter says that can be hastened. I don't think that means we can move God's appointed day of when in time that will occur. I believe it means that there is such eager anticipation that it seems as though time has sped up.

To hasten means to hurry by extra effort. We might say to someone to be quick about it.

The shepherds made haste to go into Bethlehem to see the newborn Christ.

Jesus told Zacchaeus to make haste and come down out of the tree.

Paul made haste to make it to Jerusalem in time for the Passover.

One author wrote "God has ordained the day and it won't happen till all His purposes are completed. Those purposes are accomplished when He works through His human agents to bring them about. Therefore, from a human perspective, when Christians share the gospel with others, and pray and advance the Kingdom of God in other ways, they do 'hasten' the fulfillment of God's purposes, including Christ's return."

There is a forward look with a future longing.

There is a fiery loss with a fatal languishing

B. There Is A Fiery Loss With A Fatal Languishing

Some look at the day of the Lord and the day of God as being the same event. I see them as separate events where one ends and the other begins. The final event of God's wrath when unbelievers are cast into the lake of fire will then begin the day of God where believers will spend eternity.

Last week I mentioned about the destructive power of atomic energy and how the day of the Lord could be referring to manmade nuclear devices detonated that brings a global catastrophic event, but I don't

see it as manmade but God ordained, something that He does. There may be enough nukes to totally decimate the earth, but how about the heavens? God can use any means possible, but I believe the same God who had the power to create it out of nothing has the same power to destroy into nothing. Final judgment will be complete. There will be total loss of anything and everything man has pinned his hopes in other than Jesus Christ and it will be eternal both the loss and the languishing. Man will never again be able to say look at this great kingdom I have built.

All of man's self-confidence will be stripped away, laid bare and he will see it for what it truly is – nothing. We see here that such self-confidence leads to eternal disaster.

It is a fiery loss with a fatal languishing.

There is one more verse to consider with one more point. In verse 13 we note that we are to pursue a promise that is wonderful.

III. WE ARE TO PURSUE A PROMISE THAT IS WONDERFUL – v. 13

A. It Is A Promise Of Something Near

The promise of this coming day is based on the unchanging truth of God's Word. Scoffers can mock this day and say that the universe is going to continue to go on as it always has without missing a beat. They can claim that God doesn't exist or that He doesn't or can't keep His promises. They may ridicule everything about Him but that doesn't change the fact of what will happen in the future, because God said it would.

Jesus stated that no one knows the day or hour. We can speculate all we want but will never guess the day. Prophecy is never about speculation. It should be about motivation, looking forward with eager expectation and earnest expression of living

faithfully as we mature in godliness waiting with eager anticipation the day of God.

We are to pursue a promise that is wonderful.

It is coming and the question is what are we doing to prepare for that day? Does it make us complacent or does it mold our conduct? Does His delay foster questions about God or further our quest for God?

How will you decide to live today in light of eternity?

The day of God is a promise about something near.
The day of God is a promise of something new.

B. It Is A Promise Of Something New

“But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

This promise is not speaking of the destruction of the heavens and earth but of the day of God that will usher in eternity for believers. The new heaven and earth described here are found in Revelation 21 and 22.

Revelation 21:1-5a, 9-22:7

John says nothing impure will be there.

Peter says it will be the home of righteousness. It will be righteous because God Himself will reside there. That this new heaven and earth is the home of righteousness literally means that righteousness dwells there permanently.

John MacArthur adds that “the new heavens and earth will be far more than merely new in time or chronology; they will also be new in character – righteousness will live there.”

This new heaven and earth will always and only be righteous. It truly is a wonderful promise.

So here we are living now in light of eternity, looking forward while living faithfully.

The challenge is before us.

We are to pursue a path that is wholesome.

We are to pursue a purpose that is worthy.