

We believe in His Second Coming Sunday 29 October II Peter 3

‘and He will come to judge the living and the dead.’

Introduction

What do you need reminders for? The list can be long, with prompts for work tasks that must be done soon; shopping lists – how many of us have tried to ‘remember’ without a list and forgotten essential items by the time we got into the supermarket –and later had to back! It is a constant information battle to remember so many pieces of information required for daily living. However, this is not a new situation. Dr Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), the famous 18th century English writer once remarked: It is not sufficiently considered that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed...’ [Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, p. 123]. On the public highway there are many information signs advising us about speed limits and so much more. In the New Testament the greatest number of reminders is with reference to the second coming of Jesus. I haven’t counted the number but there are certainly a lot of them. They are a call to be ready for His return in glory. So many references suggests that followers of Jesus over the centuries might be tempted to forget the importance of this subject or to acknowledge it in principle without allowing this information to have an impact on our daily lives. Is it the motivation the New Testament writers intended it to be for you and me to be the man or woman He desires us to be? The biggest concern of the New Testament writers is not whether the wider public believe in the Second Coming of Jesus, but whether Christians who claim to believe it are living in the light of that reality.

1. The denial of the fact of His coming (II Peter 3:1-4)

Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking.² I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Saviour through your apostles.³ Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.⁴ They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” He promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ (II Peter 3:3-4)

It is convenient for many people in the world today to live as if this world was all there is to life and when we die that is our lives over – for ever. For many of the richest and most powerful people in the world, though not all, this conviction can give a sense of invincibility; that they are in total control of their lives. But that is not true for any of us. Life is a precious gift but only today is guaranteed. Tomorrow may be probable and for many of us a good number of more years of life, but we cannot assume it is available. Remember the words of James 4:13-15: *Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’* In the Western world where basic needs of food and clothing and shelter are guaranteed for the vast majority of people, we can become complacent in assuming it will always be the case. As many people on the streets or in ‘temporary accommodation’ will tell you, a loss of a job at a time of heavy financial pressure or family breakdowns can very quickly lead to extremely worrying adverse personal circumstances for some individuals. There are other people who know about God and think that sometime in the future I will explore Christianity more deeply, but not now, I am too busy with... that time may never come. Whether it is our home call into eternity or by Jesus’ sudden and unexpected return, a day will come when time is called on your life and mine. Will you be ready? Will you have repented of your sins and

invited Jesus into your life as your Lord and Saviour? Will you have committed your life to be His disciple and endeavouring to the best of your ability to be a good witness for Him in whatever work, social, church or family setting you may be in week by week? On the day He comes it will be too late. Do you need to turn to Jesus today and make certain that you will be ready for His return?

2. The declaration of the context of Jesus' coming (II Peter 3:5-10)

(a) **God's past track record** (II Peter 3:5-7)⁵ *But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ⁶ By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷ By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.* God keeps His word! The Bible is a record of the acts of God in history. Whether in blessing or in judgement, we can rely on God doing what He has promised. The God who created this world perfect and ideal, not only for humans, but also for animals and the rest of creation to live in harmony together; yet how quickly humans messed up the planet. Genesis 6:5-7: *The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The Lord regretted that He had made human beings on the earth, and His heart was deeply troubled. ⁷ So the Lord said, 'I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created – and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground – for I regret that I have made them.'* God kept His word and began afresh with Noah and his descendants thousands of years ago. Now through His covenant with Noah, God promised not to destroy humanity in the same way again. Genesis 9:11 states: *I establish My covenant with you: never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.* However, at the end of the age in preparation for the new creation, Peter remind us that God will one day bring history as we know it to a close. *By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.* God means what He says. Are you ready for Jesus return and the end of the age?

(b) **God's amazing grace** (II Peter 3:8-9) ⁸ *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. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* Why is the second coming of Jesus taking so long after His first coming? The question some people were asking in Peter's day, decades later! The same answer he gave is the one we give too. It is the grace and mercy of God giving more people the opportunity to become part of God's family through putting their faith in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. It is also a challenge to the people of God to take what opportunities we have to make Christ known. Do you want to become a Christian but feel you have failed too much in the past and are not good enough to be saved? I have had a few people say that over the years to me. The answer is that none of us are good enough to be saved, but in our place on the cross the One who was good enough paid the penalty for sin on the cross with an atonement of infinite worth so that guilty sinners, may come through Jesus to the Father and receive the free gift of salvation. Free to us, but at great cost to Jesus. Do not delay outing your faith in Jesus today!

(c) **Jesus' sudden return** (II Peter 3:10)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 done in it will be laid bare.* I remember a Larry Norman song of many years ago that had the line 'I wish we'd all been ready' [1989]. Will you be ready when Jesus returns? Are you ready today if He came tonight or tomorrow? No-one knows when it will be. Jesus, Himself, chose not to know the date and time of His return. Mark 13:32-33: *But about that day*

or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, **but only the Father.** ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. Are you ready today? You can ensure you leave this place today as a follower of Jesus by taking that step of faith and praying to receive Him as your Lord and Saviour.

3. The purpose of His coming ‘to judge the living and the dead’ (I Corinthians 3:11-15)

(a) All will give an account to the Lord This is a theme that appears in a number of Bible passages. It is first spoken of in general terms in the Old Testament in Genesis 18:25, where Abraham declares: *Far be it from You to do such a thing – to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from You! Will not **the Judge of all the earth** do right?* Two examples from the New Testament are, firstly, Romans 2:15-16: Paul writes: *Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.* ¹⁵ *They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)* ¹⁶ *This will take place **on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ**, as my gospel declares.* Then, Hebrews 9:27: *Just as people are destined to die once, and **after that to face judgment**...* Those who have rejected God in this life will be confirmed in their choice for eternity just as the same will be true for those who have put their faith in the Lord Jesus. Those who never had a clear opportunity to respond to the Gospel will be judged on the basis of the knowledge they had of God and the life lived in response to that. Our focus today, though, is with respect to believers in Jesus.

(b) The nature of our Judgement I Corinthians 3:11-15: ¹¹ *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.* ¹² *If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,* ¹³ *their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.* ¹⁴ *If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward.* ¹⁵ *If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved – even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

The most important thing to say is that the child of God who has truly put their faith in the Lord Jesus is already eternally secure because of their reception of the free gift of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. He was good enough and it is in His name that we come to the Father and are welcomed into His presence as His children. So when the believer stands before the Lord it is not about the Lord drawing up a list of our errant thoughts, words or deeds, because that is to misunderstand the nature of God's undeserved favour to guilty sinners here on earth. It is purely about rewards for service done in His name which is extraordinary. In this particular passage of Scripture, in I Corinthians 3, what does Paul say to these Christian believers about that day? He speaks about work done for the Lord in Christian service for the glory of God.

(c) Different types of contribution (I Corinthians 3:12: *If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,* ¹³ *their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light.* We can only see a glimpse into what other people do or say, but their motivation for doing what they do is usually known only to God. Using the imagery of a furnace that was used to purify precious metals, Paul says that some things will receive no commendation or reward. They are like *wood, hay or straw* consumed in a furnace. What might this include? For example, it may be some good things done, but we did it only to stop someone nagging us and maybe even resented doing it. We were not doing it to please the Lord only to appease someone else! If they stopped the nagging or ceased the pressure on us then we had achieved the goal behind the undertaking of the task. Other tasks done may have been carried out to fit in with a particular church's distinctive practices or some cultural tradition, but it was not something God had revealed to us as part of the calling of a Christian

disciple. Again, it may have been something that was a positive action, but the rewards from the Lord will be for doing what He wants us to do for Him. They are described as *using gold, silver, costly stones*.

(d) **Different grounds for reward**

What things are highlighted in the Bible as grounds for being honoured in this way by the Lord?

- (i) **The imperishable crown** (I Corinthians 9:24-27: *Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.* ²⁵ *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever.* ²⁶ *Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.* ²⁷ *No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.* It is for consistent Christian discipleship, keeping on year after year in serving the Lord bringing glory to Him whether behind the scenes or in public ministry it is irrelevant. The key issue is dedicated service to honour the Lord by seeking to do our best for Him.
- (ii) **The crown of rejoicing** (I Thessalonians 2:19): *For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you?* ²⁰ *Indeed, you are our glory and joy.* The reward for leading someone else to Christ, though the witness of our life. It is not just about who prays with someone to trust the Lord. So often it is the life of a family member, friend or work colleague that we noticed, that was so attractive to us that we sought it for ourselves.
- (iii) **The crown of righteousness** (II Timothy 4:8): *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ⁸ *Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.* It is a reward for godly living motivated by wanting to honour the Lord; and should He return soon be living in a way pleasing to Him at that time.
- (iv) **The crown of glory** (I Peter 5:4) *To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed:* ² *be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve;* ³ *not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.* ⁴ *And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.* To those entrusted with Christian leadership positions, we can be an encouragement or a discouragement to other believers by the way we live. It may be leadership in pastoral care or just leadership in matters of administration or of preaching and teaching. Those who have inspired or encouraged other brothers and sisters in the way they led and lived for the Lord
- (v) **The crown of Life** (Revelation 2:10): *Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown.* It is the martyr's crown. The women and men, young or old, who give their lives for their faith in Jesus. They are faithful unto death. *Fighting the good fight of faith* (I Timothy 6:12a) is about godly living up to and including being willing to lay down your own life.

4. The devotion He wants from us in view of His coming (II Peter 3:11-18)

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live **holy and godly lives** ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found **spotless, blameless and at peace** with Him. ¹⁵ Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote to you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶ He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. ¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. ¹⁸ But **grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever! Amen.**

(a) **How should we live?** You ought to live holy and godly lives ... make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Him... But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. John, in I John 3:2 makes the same point in these words: Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ **All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as He is pure.** We keep our focus on Him, not on what other people are doing around us. The standards we seek to follow are the ones commended in God's Word. In some settings, believers will look foolish or naïve in the eyes of some for whom issues of power and self-promotion are central to their sense of identity. We sing: 'It's all about You Jesus...', but it is very hard to live that way sometimes. We have to be honest about that. Trying to deescalate arguments in a classroom or workplace or other setting, for example, can be emotionally draining and time consuming. Some of us have struggles at time to handle our emotions as well as we might when driving our cars! More seriously, what is your weak spot? What is mine? What do we need to work on most in our attitudes or conduct at this time to help us become more like Jesus? Maybe seeking to memorise one or two verses about the second coming of Jesus might be an incentive to God-honouring living as we can recall these verses at times when we are struggling to hold things together as we should.

(b) **What are we looking forward to?** ...as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming... we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. In those times of weariness and exhaustion; in those times of discouragement when we messed up or when the actions of another person or people have caused us significant hurt, to remind ourselves of how this journey will end. In Revelation 21 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, **'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.'** ⁴ "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death" or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. ⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, **'I am making everything new!'** This day is coming soon. The old hymn: 'When the trumpet of the Lord will sound and time will be no more', that we will sing later to finish our service and which I recently sang at my mother's grave makes this declaration: 'When the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there'. I want to finish by asking can you truthfully say those words? I hope and pray we can, for Jesus' name's sake Amen.

Question for reflection

Are you ready for His coming again?

How might this truth encourage you as you live for Him in the coming days?

Song for reflection: 'When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound' CMP759

[When the Roll Is Called up Yonder - YouTube](#)