

Last Days Series

2 Peter 3:1-18

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The sermons for this series are available for download on our website (www.menaibaptist.org.au)

The following questions have been prepared for personal or group use in conjunction with the sermon series. The brief answers are given in italics after most questions and are intended as prompts for those leading a group discussion. The scripture is from The New International Version.

2 Peter 3 (NIV)

¹Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. ²I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

³Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. ⁴They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." ⁵But 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. ⁶By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. ⁷By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

⁸But 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. ⁹The 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.

¹⁰But 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.

¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as 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.

¹³But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. ¹⁵Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. ¹⁶He 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.

¹⁷Therefore, 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. ¹⁸But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

Last Days #1: The Day of the Lord

2 Peter 3:1-10

a) Purpose vv1-2

¹*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 Savior through your apostles.*

1. Peter calls his readers “dear friends” which is translated from the Greek *agapatos* and means “beloved ones.” It includes the root word *agape*, the unconditional love of God. How does this greeting impact your thinking about the body of Christ and how you relate to one another?
Each believer is a beloved child of God and a beloved family member in Christ. Explore in the group answers, the attitudes and actions that a healthy church body should express to one another.
2. What two reasons does Peter give for writing about the last days? (v1 and v2)
 - 1) *To stimulate believers to wholesome thinking (= pure thinking, undiluted and uncontaminated by the world; also means applying Biblical truth to daily life and living in light of Christ’s return – cf. vv11,14,17)*
 - 2) *To help his readers remember the authoritative word spoken to them previously by the OT prophets, Jesus Christ, and the Apostles.*
3. How do these two reasons Peter gives above encourage you in your attitude to the word of God?

b) The Day of the Lord vv3-7

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.”* 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.*

4. Who do you think the scoffers are in verse 3? What motivates them?
They are cynics, mockers, skeptics, false teachers and those who scoff at the promises of God. They are motivated by evil desires (lust, greed, personal power etc)
5. The scoffers question the validity of the return of Christ. Are there any contemporary people/groups that would think similarly? What was the flaw in their reasoning? What evidence does Peter give to refute their criticisms? (vv5-7). What does the expression “the same word” in verse 7 refer to?
Contemporary groups could be various cults, and those who have been led astray by science and philosophy. Peter gives evidence from biblical history citing the “word” of God in creation and the flood. God’s word is powerful and true and will come to pass. The scoffers paid no attention to the veracity of God’s word in the past nor the future “word” spoken with reference to the coming day of the Lord.

6. How is the final judgement different from the previous judgement?
Fire compared to water (the flood; Genesis 6-9)

c) The Reason for the Delay vv8-9

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.*

7. Identify the two reasons Peter gives for the delay in the return of Christ. How do you respond to both? What personal significance does the second reason have for you?
- 1) *God is patient and doesn't view time the same way we do. His 'calendar' is not the same as ours – he measures time differently. See Psalm 90:4*
 - 2) *God is waiting for more people to repent – such is his love for his creation.*
8. Who is God placing on your mind to pray for and perhaps connect with about the importance of a relationship with God?

d) How Will it Come? v10

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.*

9. What is the significance of the “thief” imagery? (see Matthew 24:36-44).
We do not know when Jesus will return. He will come without notice.
10. If we don't know when Jesus is returning, how are we to get ready?
We can't just wait with bags packed looking to the skies and do nothing. We must get on with his work until he comes. We do not despair, but trust in God's sovereignty – he is in control of his world. See Matthew 24:45-51 [this question will be more fully answered in the next section]

Last Days #2: Living in Light of the Return of Christ

2 Peter 3:11-16

a) What Does the Future Hold? vv11-12a

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.*

There is much talk today by scientists, ethicists, ecologists, astro-physicists and others, that our sun and therefore our world and even our universe as we know it is winding down and heading toward a cosmic implosion. The sun will grow dim and cold, and along the way we will ruin the planet with pollution and wipe ourselves out. According to these secular researchers, there seems an impersonal cosmic demolition is on the way.

The Bible has also given us a picture of the destruction of the future cosmos. This could lead to despair. But there is a difference between the two views.

11. Briefly explore the secular view of the end of the world with the Biblical view.

Answers should indicate the personal way in which God is in control and the hope that the impending judgement will also result in a new beginning. If the universe ends not with an impersonal cosmic meltdown but with an encounter with the personal and living God, then our human response truly does matter. This is why Peter asks the searching question in v11, "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?"

12. How does Peter want us to think about the way we should live in light of the coming judgment?

We are to live holy and godly lives. Explore what "holy" and godly" lives might look like. Note that is not a restrictive list of do's and don'ts, but rather an expansive opportunity to please God through our words, actions, thoughts and behaviour. It is a call to live like Jesus – compassionate, honest, gracious, serving, loving.

13. What can we do to speed the coming day of the Lord?

Answers need to take in the concept of living like Jesus, with specific examples such as living in obedience to God's will (such as praying the Lord's prayer – "your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven" whereby we are praying for God to intervene and bring his kingdom but also to live as his subjects) and our verbal witness to the world (see Matthew 24:14; Acts 3:19-21).

So, what does the future hold? Not panic and hopelessness that the world is spiralling to an impersonal destructive end. Rather, because of the return of Jesus, we have an exciting life to live – one of holy and godly living, where prayer and witness and compassion for the world will hasten the day of his return. God is in his house, and he is in control. That's what the future holds.

b) Who Holds the Future? vv12b-13

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, clearly God holds the future. What sort of future is it going to be?

It is a future where God has promised to bring about a new heaven and a new earth – where righteousness reigns! We can look forward a brand new eternal home – but we shouldn't think God is abandoning this earth. No, he created a good world (Gen 1&2), very good when he breathed his spirit and image into Adam and Eve, and although he allowed it to be cursed through humanity's sinful rebellion (Gen 3), he is doing a new work of restoring and renewing creation (Romans 8:18-25; Isaiah 11:6-9, 65:17-25). That's why we are to be stewards of creation and care for the environment.

15. What does the idea of a new creation mean in respect to the word Peter uses for "new"?

The word used here in v13 for "new" (=kainos) indicates the radical newness of creation and also its continuity as a restored creation. The word means new in nature or in quality; whereas the other word for new (=neos) means new in time or origin (not used here in v13). So this new heaven and new earth is not totally "other" than the first one, but renewed and gloriously transformed so there is a continuity with the present one.

This indicates God is a specialist in renewing and restoring his special creation rather than abandoning and destroying us. As a result, we can trust God with our lives, both this life and the next.

c) How Should Then Live? vv14-16

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 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.

16. What is the significance of Peter's exhortation to "make every effort" to live holy lives? *Explore the idea that when we realise the end is approaching, that the day of judgement is coming, that we can speed the day by living to please God; then it is imperative to align our priorities with those of the scripture as Peter presents. This is not a peripheral issue – the salvation of souls is connected with our concern for their eternal welfare and for God's glory as we live in a way that pleases him.*
17. Does anything prevent you from being "found spotless, blameless and at peace with him"? What can you do about it? Are there any distractions in your life to limit your effectiveness as a follower of Jesus?
18. In light of v15, that God's patience in delaying the return of Christ means salvation, what is the major need for humanity? How am I committed to the task? *Explore the need for global mission in Jesus' name – where the church is to meet needs and preach the gospel – as Jesus did.*

Last Days #3: Glorious Benediction: Guard and Grow

2 Peter 3:17-18

a) Be on your guard v17

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.

19. What has Peter forewarned his readers about? (this question is aimed at summarising what people have understood from Peter's letter). Why do you think Peter so clear about the warning he gives? *Peter describes these people as scoffers who are lawless, evil, heading for destruction.*
20. In light of the warning, what does Peter exhort believers to do? *Be on guard, be vigilant, be aware of the danger. Peter is urgent and loving in his tone.*
21. What do you think Peter means by "fall from your secure position?" Does this mean a believer can lose their salvation? What evidence does Peter give throughout the letter about how secure our position is in Christ? Other NT writers?
2 Peter 1:10, 12; 3:17
Paul: Romans 8:37-39; Ephesians 1:3-14
John: 1 John 5:13

Conversion to Jesus Christ provides a solid foundation, a security, for spiritual vitality in this life and glory in the next. The word Peter uses implies that Christians can have confidence in this foundation (it is secure, v17). But he also warns about "falling from" that foundation.

What does this mean? **Calvinists** would state that a believer's salvation is secure in the promises of God as he brings the elect into eternity, whereas an **Armenian** position teaches that salvation is dependent on a believer continuing in the faith in order to be sure of their salvation.

The weight of NT evidence (not a 100% position, hence the arguments for 2000 years!) leans towards a more-or-less Calvinist position that our salvation in Christ is secure and nothing can change that – a true believer (called and elected) cannot lose their salvation. However, there are clear **warnings** about **continuing** in the faith **till the end**. Eg. Revelation 2:5; Romans 11:22; Colossians 1:23.

Here in 2 Peter 3:17 we again find the typical New Testament **combination of security and warning**. What is the point of the warning? Clearly Peter is concerned that believers not view their "security" in Christ (however understood) to condone a careless attitude toward the struggle with sin. Confidence in our status with Christ should never lead to a presumption on God's grace that leads us to toy with the danger of false teachers or that negates serious striving after holiness.

So, what is the best strategy for standing firm and not being carried away by these false teachers? It is to **keep progressing** in their faith. Peter turns to this as he closes his letter.

b) Grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ v18

¹⁸ *But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

22. What is the best way not to be carried away by false teachers and risk falling from a solid foundation in Christ?

To keep on growing in Christ!

J. I. Packer illustrates this priority of growth:

"God intends that all Christians should grow. Parents of newborns find great joy in them, but imagine the distress they would feel if the months and years went by and their baby still remained a baby, smiling and kicking in its crib, but never growing. We should not allow ourselves to forget that God must know comparable distress when we, his born-again children, fail to grow in grace... The general idea of growth covers change, development, enlarging, gaining strength and showing energy, advancing, deepening, ripening, and maturing."

Peter teaches this concept in his first letter **1 Peter 2:2** (NIV) "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation." We grow primarily through getting into the word of God. Growing in our knowledge.

Growing in knowledge is one thing – fairly easy to understand, but still requires discipline to commit to throughout our life. Are we life-long learners? **But what of growing in grace?**

23. How do we do grow in grace? Isn't grace God's unmerited favour, something he simply gives us?

Explore the answer in light of the following quote...

J. C. Ryle writes:

“When I speak of growth in grace I only mean increase in the degree, size, strength, vigor and power of the graces which the Holy Spirit plants in a believer’s heart. I hold that every one of those graces admits of growth, progress, and increase. I hold that repentance, faith, hope, love, humility, zeal, courage and the like may be little or great, strong or weak, vigorous or feeble, and may vary greatly in the same man at different periods of his life. When I speak of a man growing in grace, I mean simply this—that his sense of sin is becoming deeper, his faith stronger, his hope brighter, his love more extensive, his spiritual-mindedness more marked. He feels more of the power of godliness in his own heart. He manifests more of it in his life. He is going on from strength to strength, from faith to faith and from grace to grace.”

Such growth in grace is not only **individual** but **congregational**. Paul is making a plea for unity in the body of Christ in the Ephesian congregation when he pleads with them not to be “infants” but “in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ” (Ephesians 4:14–15). Likewise, we may be sure that Peter speaks collectively as well as individually when he addresses his *dear friends* and calls them to *grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord*.

24. How are we growing in grace and knowledge here at MBC?

***Individually** growing – getting into scripture, studying the word of God, memorising verses to lock them in your heart, reading through the whole counsel of God. And **congregationally** growing together – being a member in a healthy connect group (home bible study group), attending seminars to learn about our faith, reading books that stimulate our understanding of God. Are we deepening in passion for Jesus; loving God and others more wholeheartedly; enjoying the favour and blessing of God in increasing measure? Peter spells this out earlier in this same letter - 2 Peter 1:5-11.*

Peter finishes his letter with a burst of **doxology**: “To him be glory both now and forever! Amen”.

25. Why is this a remarkable way to finish the letter?

Peter uses an expression that is only reserved for God himself. This is a short but powerful reminder of the deity of Jesus Christ – he is God and receives all the glory God deserves from the Apostle Peter.

26. Do you relate to Jesus as fully God? If so, how do you give to Jesus all the glory due to him?

CONCLUSION:

Jesus is coming back. We are to actively wait for his return. How? By purposefully living like Jesus – being salt and light/ holy and godly/spotless and blameless. Lives that are based on the scriptures and growing in the knowledge and grace of God. As we **live lives like Jesus**, we are to **get on with the work of Jesus** – the work he left us to do. Heal the sick. Comfort the grieving. Welcome the marginalised. Defend the orphans. Do justice. Share Christ. Preach the gospel. Make disciples. And, being the **presence** of Jesus – reflecting and sharing the **grace** of Jesus to a dark, hurting and dying world.

As we do this, we will not fall from our secure position, rather we can stand firm and speed the day of Christ’s return through our godly living and priority of mission. Peter wrote this letter so that believers would be **ready** for the return of Christ and **live lives** that honour his name and hasten his return. **How will Jesus find you when he returns?** In danger of falling, or growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Additional Section (this was summarised at the beginning of the third sermon)

What do we know?

- We are in the **last days** (2 Peter 3:3)
- **Jesus will return** (Jesus has promised – John 14:1-4; Matthew 24:26-31; apostles affirm it – Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-18; Peter in 2 Peter and John in Revelation 22:7)
- The return is **delayed** because God is patient, holds time differently to us and wants more people to repent (2 Peter 3:8-9)
- A terrible day of **judgement** is coming, “day of the Lord” (2 Peter 3:7, 10; Isaiah 2:12, 17)
- The judgement will result in **two groups of people** (the *righteous* – sheep & *unrighteous* – goats Matthew 25:31-46)
- Jesus is the **judge** (Acts 10:42, 17:31)
- **Basis** for judgement – what people do with Jesus in this lifetime (Luke 8:38)
- **After judgement** – eternal life v eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46)
- **New heavens and a new earth** (2 Peter 3:13; Isaiah 65; Revelation 21)
- Glimpses of **heaven** Revelation 21 & 22
- Because we know these things, we are called **to live in light of his coming** (2 Peter 3:11-18; Matthew 24:45-51; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11)

What we do not know

- When it will all happen (Matthew 24:42-44)
- Whether the true church will be “raptured” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) before the “Great Tribulation” (see Daniel 9:24-27) and whether these events are literal or not.
- When the “millennium” period will happen (Revelation 20:4-7) or whether the time frame is only symbolic.

The difficulty in interpreting the eschatological themes in the Bible is that although it is clear that God is in control of the future, much of the language used in these passages is inescapably metaphorical in character and therefore does not provide us with precise information. However, it does enable the Christian community to live in faith, hope and obedience regarding the revealed will of God for how we should live in light of the return of Christ. AMEN!