

WE CAN DO THIS

II PETER 3:1-7

EACH MILLENNIUM THAT PASSES, EACH CENTURY THAT PASSES, EACH YEAR, WEEK, DAY THAT PASSES, BRINGS US CLOSER TO OUR LORD'S RETURN. AS THAT DAY GROWS NEARER, WE MUST BECOME MORE ALERT AND STRONG

Outline

I. WE CAN THINK CLEARLY (VS 1-2)

WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN FAMILY, ABILITY, AND GUIDANCE TO HELP US FINISH STRONG.

- A. WE ARE LOVED BY GOD AND ONE ANOTHER (1a)
 - B. WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN CLEAR MINDS (1b)
 - C. WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN CLEAR MESSAGES (2)
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II. WE CAN BE PREPARED (VS 3-4)

IF WE CONTINUE TO STAY CONNECTED TO GOD AND HIS TRUTH, WE WILL NOT BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD AT THE INCREASE IN EVIL AS THE END DRAWS NEAR.

- A. WE WILL NOT BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD (3a)
 - B. WE WILL UNDERSTAND THEIR MOTIVATION (3b)
 - C. WE SHOULD BE READY FOR THE QUESTIONS (4)
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III. WE CAN KNOW THE ANSWERS (VS 5-7)

GOD HAS PREPPED US WITH ALL THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS THAT WILL CHALLENGE OUR FAITH.

- A. KNOW WHO GOD IS (5)
 - B. KNOWING THE POWER OF GOD (6)
 - C. KNOWING THE PATIENCE OF GOD (7)
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II PETER 3:1-7

The way I have preached through this letter, we may miss Peter's tone. Peter has been railing against false teachers. It was as if he went nuts criticizing them and condemning them. It has been a diatribe against false teachers. I have preached these passages as if they presented us with an opportunity to examine ourselves. In other words, I used these as an occasion for us as Christian people and leaders to reflect on how our walk is with Jesus. Are we demonstrating the marks of authentic Christianity, or have we already fallen for false theology and philosophies? Peter said that the marks of authentic Christians and authentic Christian leaders are a strong commitment to reading, studying, and submitting to the Bible. The other mark of an authentic Christian is the pursuit of holiness in our everyday lives. But Peter's intent was to expose and blast the false teachers that threatened the health of his congregations.

Now at the start of chapter 3, he returns to addressing the congregations. The tone softens a little and he becomes more gentle and more of a teacher. Now that he has raved and ranted, he is going to settle down and talk to his people as a parent talks to their teenagers. He says that he trusts them and that he has confidence in them. He just wants them to be prepared when they are presented with false teachings and temptations to act out immorally. He wants them to be prepared.

It is always necessary for us to be prepared and to help prepare those who come

behind us. For example, in the military, when you run in formation, if there is an obstruction in the way or some sort of pothole, the first runner will hold up his hand, warning those behind him there is something to look out for and avoid.

It's the same for Peter, and the same for all the churches who have come after him. You know, I'd like to say this happened at the church that was so tough, ... but it didn't. It happened right here at Devon Church .

Now I don't know what went on before I got here, but during my very first day in the office, I got a phone call from the pastor who came before me.

He said, "Look in your top right hand drawer. I have left you two envelopes. If you start to run into some problems, open envelope #1."

I guess I have been pretty lucky here over the years, because I never had to open the envelopes. Before going on Sabbatical, I cleaned out my desk. I wanted to get rid of anything I no longer needed. I came across the envelopes, and my curiosity got the best of me. I wondered, "Do I still need these?"

I opened envelope #1. It said, "Hang in there. This is a tough congregation, but you can do it." It went on encouraging me to keep on working and not to get discouraged. The letter ended, "Feel free to blame everything that has gone wrong on me." And the P.S. at the bottom of the letter stated that when things got worse, I was to open letter #2.

Now I was really interested, so I opened letter #2. It simply read, "Prepare two envelopes."

Thank God, I have never needed to really open those letters, ... but I didn't throw them out. I resealed them, and put them back in my desk.

Peter wants us to be prepared as the time of Jesus' return draws closer.

Perhaps it is because the church doesn't face much persecution in the United States , or perhaps it's because most of us are living relatively comfortable lifestyles. But the reality is that we don't spend a lot of time thinking about the return of Christ. Sometimes our thoughts are turned towards heaven when someone close to us dies, or

when we find ourselves facing life-threatening illnesses. But for the most part, we don't consciously make decisions based on the fact that Jesus could return at any moment.

I think it would be a fantastic reminder for us if we did. For example, if we would ask ourselves before saying or doing something, "What if Jesus were to return right now? Would I want this to be the very last thing I said or did before He came to take me home?"

That's kind of how Peter wants to motivate his congregations to holy living. Peter wants to give them a very realistic assessment of the way things will be as we get closer to the time of Christ's return. The main idea of this morning's text is this. **EACH MILLENNIUM THAT PASSES, EACH CENTURY THAT PASSES, EACH YEAR, WEEK, DAY THAT PASSES, BRINGS US CLOSER TO OUR LORD'S RETURN... AS THAT DAY GROWS NEARER, WE MUST BECOME MORE ALERT AND STRONGER.** Peter is going to make it crystal clear that the Devil will step up his game as the Day of our Lord draws near. The closer the time comes to the second coming of Jesus, the more ferocious Satan and his demons will become. I always think a good model for us to look at is the events leading up to Israel's freedom from Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The closer the Hebrews got to gaining their freedom, the more ferociously Pharaoh treated them.

Sometimes I work myself up into a frenzy, wondering if I will be tough enough to stand up to the persecution when it comes. In other words, will I be able to stand firm in my faith for Jesus Christ? Invariably, whether through passages like this, or through some reassuring feeling from the Holy Spirit, I hear, "You can do it." And the message today is that we can do it as a church.

In verses 1-2 Peter states very clearly that we can think clearly. We have said this many times before, but it is worth repeating. The battle for faithfulness starts in the mind. We must develop good, clear thinking patterns. And God has given us much help in accomplishing this goal. In other words **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN FAMILY, ABILITY, AND GUIDANCE TO HELP US FINISH STRONG.**

I don't know if Peter got to this place in his life because he is just older and therefore

more mellow, or if he has continued to look back on all the failures in his life and had come to realize how gracious God had been to him. Perhaps it was a combination of the two.

Peter's attention in the first half of verse 1 is drawn to the fact that we are loved by God and loved by one another. In other words, we are family. Peter addresses his people as "beloved." In some translations, it is translated as dear friends, and I'm sure they do it because beloved sounds very archaic to us moderns. But it is a word that is very powerful and descriptive. This is a word worth resurrecting in the church. In a world and a culture that doesn't understand love, and where many feel isolated, lonely, and unloved, we believers need to consistently remind ourselves and one another that God loves us and we love one another. The main characteristic of the Christian community that attracted so many was the way they loved and cared for one another. Peter used this word 8 times in his two letters. He says this is his second letter. We don't know if he is referring to I Peter or if there is another letter that has been lost. Nevertheless, what is first and foremost in his mind is that without love, Christianity is merely another set of religious rules and regulations. Christianity is unique in that God demonstrated His love for us by sending Jesus to suffer and die on our behalf. Jesus demonstrated His love for us by dying on our behalf. The Holy Spirit demonstrates His love for us by forming, gifting, and leading the church. If you are a Christian, you are beloved by God and by the family of God. If you are not a believer, and feel unloved, I want to inform you that a loving God is waiting to enter a relationship with you, and there is a loving family waiting for you as well. My feeling is that we should preach the gospel to ourselves everyday, reminding ourselves of God's love for us in Christ. Love is a powerful motivator.

The next gift God gave us is described in the second half of verse 1 as clear minds. Peter says that he wrote these letters with the purpose of stimulating them to wholesome thinking. Again, we miss the force of Peter's emotion because the word stimulate has been diluted in our culture. We have all sorts of stimulants. The word actually means to shake up, to stir up, and to wake up. Peter wishes that someone would have shaken him up and awakened him to pray and be prepared through clear thinking that night Jesus was betrayed and Peter failed miserably. Peter doesn't want any of us to fail. And so, he is shaking and waking his congregations to good, clear,

sound, and pure thinking. Plato used this phrase, “Wholesome thinking” to mean pure reason. For Plato, reason was to rule over our desires and passions. Reason was god-given and leads us to truth and successful living.

For Peter, this pure, wholesome thinking would lead us to God’s truth as we read, study, and submit to the Bible. As we conform our wills to the will of God as spelled out in the Bible, we will be able to withstand the attacks of Satan and the world. The Apostle Paul states that we are to take all of thoughts captive and make them obedient to Christ. Having a renewed mind helps us to recognize truth and live holy lives. But again, for Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles, truth is found in Scripture.

And in verse 2 Peter states that God has given us a clear message in the Bible. Reading the Bible, studying the Bible, and memorizing the Bible is imperative if we want to live authentic, successful Christian lives. Peter says that he wants them to remember the words of Scripture. The Old Testament was written by Holy Spirit inspired prophets. The New Testament was written by Holy Spirit inspired Apostles and their disciples.

What are some of the commands Christ gave us? He said that we are to love God with all our hearts, souls, mind, and strength. We are to love one another as He loves us. We are to be holy because our God is holy. We are to be perfect because our Heavenly Father is perfect.

I don’t think Peter is being too complicated. We are to define life: who we are, Who God is, and what He expects from us, by the truths as spelled out in the Bible. We are to pursue holiness by loving God and loving one another as we become more like Jesus. Every day we need to try to think and act more and more like Jesus.

We have some powerful gifts to help us in our pursuit of holiness. God gave us a family. He has become our Father and we have become brothers and sisters to one another. He has renewed our minds. We don’t have to be confused by worldly thinking. God has redeemed us and given us clear and holy minds. And He has made very clear what He expects of us by leaving us His Word, the Bible. The fact is **WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN FAMILY, ABILITY, AND GUIDANCE TO HELP US FINISH STRONG.**

One thing the Bible emphasizes with regularity is that we must not only just start out strong, we must finish strong. The closer we come to the return of Christ, the more challenging it will be for us to stay strong and finish strong in faith. But we can do it because in verses 3-4 Peter says that we can be prepared. In other words **IF WE CONTINUE TO STAY CONNECTED TO GOD AND HIS TRUTH, WE WILL NOT BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD AT THE INCREASE IN EVIL AS THE END DRAWS NEAR.**

The Apostle seems just like overprotective parents. In the first half of verse 3 he makes it clear that he doesn't want us to be caught off guard. In verse 1 Peter wanted to refresh our memories of who we are in Christ. In verse 2 he wanted us to remember and understand that God's truth is found as we read, study, and submit to the Bible. Here in verse 3, he wants us to understand that there will always be people who try and discredit our faith and our Lord. Further, as the end draws near, the attacks will increase. When we see public figures, political leaders, public school systems misrepresent or ridicule Christianity, we shouldn't be caught off guard. I don't think I am overly sensitive to this, nor does it really disturb my spirit. I think what I'm about to make is a fairly objective statement. Traditional, orthodox Christianity, together with traditional, orthodox Judaism is under attack. The attack is systematic and intentional. There is a real attempt to remove traditional Jewish and Christian values and thoughts from the marketplace. It is fashionable for schools to promote Native American spirituality, Eastern mystic religions of all sorts, and Islam. But they intentionally attempt to stifle and stamp out Judaism and Christianity. They miss no opportunity to demean the traditional beliefs of Judaism and Christianity. They don't miss an opportunity to show defective, radical, misguided expressions of Christianity. There is an intentional, concerted effort to erase Christian and Jewish values from the minds of Americans. I don't think that I have overstated this in any way.

I'm sure many Christians wonder why this is happening and why people want to rid the American conscience of Jewish Christian values. In the second half of verse 3 Peter says we can understand their motivation if we simply observe their behavior. People and cultures want to rid themselves of Christian values because then they are free to pursue their own evil lusts and desires. Do we really have to spend a lot of time proving this? Just take a look at our culture. We are so sexually immoral, that almost

nothing shocks us. Even a very casual look at the divorce rate, the abortion rate, the sexually transmitted disease rate, the unwed mother rate, demonstrates that as a culture we have run amok. The way we pursue wealth and power at the expense of the poor is unconscionable. There is no war on poverty. There is a war against the poor. Listen to the words of popular songs, look at popular video games, and look at the latest rock videos. They have married sex together with violence. Our young people are extremely agitated, on edge, frustrated, and violent. We have destroyed our environment. Our culture has effectively neutralized the values of traditional Judaism and Christianity. Don't be confused or surprised. Scoffers scoff and mockers mock because they don't want the Bible to be true. They are offended by the morality of the Bible.

Our culture is attracted to anything or any theory that will cast Jesus in a negative light. Our culture hungers to make Jesus a totally human figure. Our culture wants nothing to do with a resurrected Jesus. That's why books and films that cast a shadow on the Jesus of the Bible sell so well in our western culture.

If Jesus is indeed God Who came in the flesh, died, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, ... Then He will keep His promise to come and judge the living and the dead. Everyone who has not submitted to the moral values and commands of Jesus will be judged and sent to hell. Our culture is hoping against this. So please, don't be surprised as the schools, the politicians, and the culture conspire to shut Christians up and shut Christianity and Judaism out. They do it in order that they can make up their own rules for living and feel free to pursue their immoral lifestyles. They want nothing to do with the judgment of God.

We as believers should not be caught off guard, and we should be clear about the world's motivation. We probably should rejoice because the increase in antagonism towards Christianity means there is a ripple in the spiritual world. Satan must sense the end coming closer and closer so he is stepping up the attacks. But we must be ready for the questions the world will throw at young believers as described in verse 4.

We need to keep in mind that as Peter writes this to his congregations, these churches are less than 35-years-old. These false teachers taunted the early church with the first question, "Where is Jesus? He said He was coming back, and He's still not here."

Their point is that if Jesus has not returned, then He really didn't raise from the dead, and He is not going to come back to judge. Therefore, they could live and do what they want in the flesh.

I guess that's one way of looking at it. But let's think about this from our perspective. Jesus said He would return someday to judge the living and the dead. It has been over 2,000 years. Many detractors of Christianity will say, "It ain't happening." But I think we as believers need to remind one another that we are 2,000 closer to his return than the early church. Certainly we are getting close.

Their second question to these mockers was, "It seems as if the world continues to go on like it always has. What has this notion of God got to do with anything?" In other words, we have come to worship science and the supposed laws of nature. We have come to believe in a naturalistic, atomistic view of life. We do not acknowledge a God Who is intimately involved with people or creation.

I don't think Peter was so interested in debating the false teachers as he was interested in strengthening the faith of the young believers in his congregations. He didn't want them to be confused. That is where my heart. I'm not interested in the public debate. I personally am not interested in debating politics or public policy. I am interested in preparing all of you to withstand the attacks and persecution that will inevitably come to pass. I don't want any of you to be caught off guard or by surprise. The movement against Judaism and Christianity is starting to gain steam. It's not going to be long before it is in full force. But we should not be surprised or discouraged because the more these persecutions pick up, the closer we know the return of Jesus is. Listen, **IF WE CONTINUE TO STAY CONNECTED TO GOD AND HIS TRUTH, WE WILL NOT BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD AT THE INCREASE IN EVIL AS THE END DRAWS NEAR.**

The world will continue to throw up these silly arguments against traditional Judaism and Christianity. They will continue to attack the moral commands of God by trying to discredit the Biblical Jesus. But as Peter points out in verses 6-7, we can know the answers. In other words, **GOD HAS PREPPED US WITH ALL THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS THAT WILL CHALLENGE OUR FAITH.** When I think about the fact that Peter was a fisherman, with no formal

theological training, I'm amazed at how he put these answers together. In verse 5 he wants us know Who God is. He connects the passage with the words, word and water. God Himself answered the questions in the past and He will answer them again in the future. God answered with His word and with water. God spoke creation into existence. Genesis 1 is peppered with the phrase, "And God said, 'Let there be,' ... and there was." From the first chapter of the Gospel of John, we know that Jesus was the Word and by this Word, we have received salvation from future judgment.

Further, water played a major part of creation. There seems to have been a bubble of water surrounding the atmosphere of the earth, and the earth seemed to be one big ocean before God brought forth land.

To sum up Who God is, we could say He is the creator and sustainer of the universe. He created with His word and with water. When we became Christians, we were baptized with water and the Holy Spirit. God created the heavens and the earth.

Verse 6 goes on to encourage us in knowing the power of God. God used water in creation, but He could also take this life-giving water and use it to destroy the world and all of humanity. It's interesting to me that all cultures have a flood story. Geology points to a catastrophic flood event. I think that science made two dramatic shifts from the beginning of creation. Physics, biology, and chemistry all changed radically at the time Adam and Eve introduced sin and death into the world. And the sciences changed radically one more time during the flood. God proved that He could take His creative power and change it into destructive power. So in answer to those who say the world goes on as it always has, the answer is, "No it won't. God created the heavens and the earth. He will destroy them and build a new heaven and a new earth. And the unbelievers will not be part of that. They will spend an eternity in hell." So the further answer is, "People may mock and dismiss the moral truths of Christianity, but someday, God will show up and judge them. I don't have to be judgmental. I don't have to prove them wrong. I don't even have to argue against them. The fact is, God will come back and judge them. Like we said before, it doesn't matter if people believe in Him or not. He will come back to judge them. God's existence does not depend on whether or not we believe in Him."

Verse 7 however reminds us to know all about the patience of God. Peter has just

said that God created by the word and by water. Further, Peter pointed out that not only did God create using water, He also destroyed the entire earth and human population with water. But we are also reminded that He saved 8 people and 2 of every animal through the flood.

Here in verse 7 Peter now says that God will judge and destroy the earth with His word. Jesus is described as the Word of God in John 1. Further John said that all things that exist were created by and through Jesus. Here we are informed that not only will Jesus return in the flesh, He is coming to judge and destroy the earth, this time by fire. To the answer to the second question, "Where is Jesus?" the answer is, "He is patiently waiting for people to repent and submit to His moral law." God created by His Word, and now He will destroy the wicked by His Word. Jesus not only came and died for our sins, Jesus rose from the dead and He will return to judge the living and the dead. All these people who have tried to mock and silence Jesus and Christianity will someday have to stand before His judgment seat and hear Him send them to hell for an eternity.

That was the negative statement of the return of Jesus. But Jesus, the word, can also deliver us from judgment. Jesus died for our sins and when we give our lives to Him, He promises to take away our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Just as God saved Noah and his family from the flood, Jesus will bring us safely through the judgment.

However, let's just think about our lifestyles for a moment. We work so hard for things that will ultimately be burned up in the judgment. Let us continue to reevaluate what we are spending our time, energy, and money on. We do not belong to this world. Let us continue to pursue holiness. Holiness belongs to our eternal homes. There is no reason for us to be confused by the world. **GOD HAS PREPPED US WITH ALL THE ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS THAT WILL CHALLENGE OUR FAITH.**

As we see our world spin out of control with violence, immorality, and the persecution of Christians, we should not become discouraged. We should look for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. Every day that passes brings us one day closer to His return. **EACH MILLENNIUM THAT PASSES, EACH CENTURY THAT PASSES,**

EACH YEAR, WEEK, DAY THAT PASSES, BRINGS US CLOSER TO OUR LORD'S RETURN. AS THAT DAY GROWS NEARER, WE MUST BECOME MORE ALERT AND STRONGER.

God has given us all we need to prepare for the end times. He has given us family. He has become our Father and made us brothers and sisters. As we learn to love God and one another, we get stronger. He has given us clear minds. He has given us the Bible and His Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth. He has informed us that we will face difficult times towards the end of time, but that we shall have strength to overcome the world.

We must continue to prepare ourselves by reading, studying, memorizing, and submitting to the Bible. And we must stay on track by pursuing holiness in our everyday lives.

We must however be prepared and not become distracted. In April of 1988 the evening news reported on a skydiving incident.

A skydiving club decided to document the experience of skydiving. The photographer jumped from the plane along with the other skydivers and filmed the group as they fell and opened their parachutes. On the film shown on the telecast, as the final skydiver opened his chute, the picture went berserk. The reporter announced that the cameraman had fallen to his death, having jumped out of the plane without his parachute. It wasn't until he reached for the absent ripcord that he realized he was freefalling without a chute.

Until that point, the jump probably seemed exciting and fun. But tragically, he had acted with thoughtless haste and deadly foolishness. Nothing could save him, for his faith was in a parachute left back in the plane.

As we step out into life, we must remember to strap on Jesus. Then we will be prepared to face whatever this world throws at us. Be prepared. We can do it.