

West Valley Church
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On This Rock Part Fifteen *2 Peter 3:17-18¹*

There is a story about the Apostle Peter from somewhere between 65 and 70 AD. The great fire of Rome was burning and smoldering. Nero blamed the fire on the Christians so he could use it as an opportunity to kill them all. The Apostle Peter had been warned that this was coming, so he made plans to flee from Rome. When he got to the gate that he would go through to leave Rome, Peter saw a vision of Jesus carrying a cross, heading *into* Rome. Peter stopped and said, "Lord where are you going?" Jesus responded by saying "where I go you cannot come, but you will come later" – a quote of what Jesus told the disciples before he died, in John 13:36.

Peter understood what it meant; Jesus was going to Rome in order to be crucified again, alongside all of the Christians who were being crucified and put to death. Peter knew then that he needed to return to Rome also. When he did, Nero was able to arrest him and led Peter to the place of his crucifixion. The 4th century historian Jerome records that Peter was crucified *upside down*, with his head being down and his feet upward – at Peter's own insistence – because he said he was unworthy to be crucified in the same way as Christ was. Peter's wife was crucified beside him.

That occurred within only a year or two after Peter concluded his second letter. Peter had a strong sense of his martyrdom when he wrote it. As if the letters of Peter in Scripture weren't important enough, his impending death makes the conclusion of his letters even more important for us to pay attention to. We've spent fourteen weeks in the letters of Peter with our series called, "On this Rock: Peter and the Church." We've learned valuable lessons and been challenged many times about living godly lives, about what virtues we need to have in our lives, and about what and who to avoid if we are going to continue to grow in our faith. At times, this series has spoken providentially to our circumstances, and at other times it has drawn our eyes away from our circumstances and toward Christ. Today, we are going to conclude this series by looking at Peter's closing comments in the last two verses of 2 Peter. Please allow me to read them to you, and as I do, I'd ask you to

¹ Resources used for this series:

- [The Letters of James and Peter \(The Daily Study Bible Series\)](#), William Barclay
- [1 & 2 Peter, Jude: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition](#), Daniel G. Powers
- [Hebrews through Revelation: Beacon Bible Commentary](#), Ralph Earle, Ed.
- [More Hard Sayings of the New Testament](#), Peter H. Davids
- [James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude: The Communicator's Commentary](#), Paul A. Cedar
- [Tyndale New Testament Commentary: First Peter](#), Wayne A Grudem
- [1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition](#), David A. Case and David W. Holdren

keep your Bibles or your devices open to this passage as we go through it. I'll be reading 2 Peter 3:17-18, and it says this:

“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. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.” (2 Peter 3:17-18, niv)

First, remember that we've always said, whenever you are reading the Bible and you come across the word “Therefore” you need to ask, “What is it there for?” In this case, consider it a concluding word or a summary word; it's a way of saying, “as a result of everything I've written to you, remember *this....*” We don't have time to review all that we've gone through, but just understand the word is there to say, “Let me summarize, so pay very close attention!”

Got it? Let's make sure we do that.

Next, Peter greets them as “dear friends.” Remember that he's used this greeting before, and it means “beloved.” It is a very endearing and tender term. It's because of his love for them that he's spoken so plainly up until now, and it's in that same love that he now gives them - and us - this final charge.

The first thing Peter reminds us is that...

1. We are warned.

When Peter says, “Since you have been forewarned...” he's saying, “now that you know everything I've just told you, you are responsible for what you know.” They say that ignorance is bliss, and in many ways that's true. If a little child doesn't know that his mom or dad don't want him taking a cookie from the cookie jar, and he takes a cookie, it's not right for the parents to punish him, because he didn't know. But once he knows, he is responsible. So in that sense, ignorance *is* bliss – *one time*, anyway. But that doesn't apply to us; now that we've learned all these things that Peter has told us in his letters, we don't get to plead ignorance; as Christians we have no excuses. We know the right way and its rewards, and we know the wrong way and its disasters.

Scholar William Barclay says, “(We) have no right to expect an easy way, for (we've) been told that Christianity means a cross, and (we've) been warned that there will always be those who are ready to attack and to pervert the faith. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. But to be forewarned is also a grave responsibility, for (when we know the right and do the wrong, we are) under a double condemnation.”²

If you saw the early Spiderman movies, you remember that Peter Parker's uncle told him, “With great power comes great responsibility.” Well, Peter the Apostle is saying, “With knowledge of Christ comes great responsibility.”

In these two verses Peter gives a powerful summary of chapters one and two of his letter. So when he says, “be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the lawless...”

² Barclay, p 350

he is summarizing his warnings from chapter two and three, and when he says, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior,” he’s reiterating a key theme that is in chapter one. So he’s giving a summary or reminder of what he’s written. In both cases, now we know that we are expected to keep actively growing in our relationship with, and knowledge of, Jesus, and we know enough to keep from being deceived by the false teachers. So in either case – growing and avoiding – we now have no excuses because we’ve been warned.

In fact, there is another part of that warning: if we aren’t careful, Peter says we might fall from our secure position. What does he mean by that? That phrase means this: it describes someone who fell from a higher position to a lower position or condition. Here’s what that means for us: Peter is saying that our position in Christ is in contrast to what he called the “unstable” position of the false teachers. So if we don’t heed his warnings, we will fall from our stable position in our relationship with Christ to a very unstable position of no relationship with Christ. When you are saved, you can be confident in what God has done for you. But Peter is also warning that it is possible to fall from that secure foundation. One scholar said, “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 (and) negates our striving after holiness.”³ So we’ve been amply warned.

The next thing Peter reminds us of in this summary is that...

2. We must wait and watch.

Ever since Jesus ascended into heaven and we were given the promise of his return (Acts 1:11), believers have been waiting for Christ’s return. And as we’ve seen, within just a few short years of Jesus’ ascension, there were those who denied and mocked whether Jesus would return at all. The longer we wait, the more bold the deniers and mockers get. But Peter firmly calls us to *wait*. He’s saying, “Wait fooor iiiiiit....!”

Peter clears up any doubts: the reason for Jesus’ delay is not due to any deficiency or dereliction on God’s part, nor is it a broken promise. The delay is purely due to God’s patience and his desire to see more people be saved and given abundant life in a relationship with God through Christ.

But waiting is not something we *passively* do; we don’t just sit around, or take a long spiritual nap, or do nothing until Jesus comes back.

I’m sure Peter is thinking of the lesson he learned the night that Jesus was betrayed; Jesus took Peter and James and John into the Gethsemane olive grove to wait and pray with him while he went a few feet away from them. Jesus agonized in prayer, and when he came up for a break, he found them sleeping. Jesus woke them up and warned them to stay awake, then went back to pray. Jesus warned them:

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.” (Matthew 26:41)

³ Powers, p. 244

This happened two more times, before Jesus was arrested and taken away. And remember, it was *that* night that Peter denied that he even knew who Jesus was.

With that lesson lingering in his mind, Peter reminds us: ours is an *active* waiting; it means we are to be watching, praying, attentive. We are not to be lulled into a life of inattentiveness or carelessness. Remember that Peter warned us in his first letter (5:8) to be alert because the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. In the second letter, Peter warns us to watch so that we are on our guard against those who will try to weaken or distract us in our growth in grace.

So now, here we are approaching the end of the second millennium that we've waited for Jesus to return. The danger of inattentiveness is an even greater threat the longer it takes. The warning to watch and pray so that we don't fall into temptation has never been more relevant than it is now. Don't presume on God's grace; don't let the time that we've been waiting lull you into a lazy life in Christ; don't let the time rob you of your urgency. The need to introduce others to Jesus and to bring the Kingdom of God here to West Valley has never been more urgent, never been more needed. Because waiting and watching means...

3. We must work.

Peter makes it clear that we are not only to wait and watch; we are called to work. We are not only to remain on guard, we are to grow more in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Remember when we talked about this; growth in grace and knowledge is two things: we grow in our closeness of relationship to Christ and we grow in our knowledge about Christ.

But it takes intentionality, effort, and persistent work in order to grow, and Peter calls us to do it.

Remember he called us to pursue the moral virtues that were described in 1:5-7, and we are to pursue them and produce them in "increasing measure" so that we can remain effective and productive. There's never an appropriate time for us to *stop* working on our growth, or else we might fall back from our secure position.

It's work for sure, but it is not an unbearable or inflexible work; it means that every day we experience the wonder of grace and we grow in the insight and transformation that grace brings. Every day we enter more and more deeply into the wonder of who Jesus is and that we can know him personally. It takes discipline, intention and attentiveness on our part, but it is incredibly and deeply rewarding and filled with joy, peace, power, and purpose.

And remember, not only are we called to work out our own salvation; Jesus has delayed his return because he is waiting on you and I to introduce others to him. That is such a key part of our work.

When we do those things, that is how...

4. We will worship.

After Peter reminds us that we've been warned, that we need to wait and watch and work at our growth and helping others know Jesus, he says that when those things happen, then "to Jesus be glory both now and forevermore!"

There's something cool that Peter is doing here, just to make sure there's no doubts about what he's saying. He's saying that Jesus will be glorified both *now* and (literally) "until the day of eternity." Here's why that's cool: remember that the false teachers were living sinful lives now, because they said Jesus was not going to return. Peter is saying that it is our responsibility to glorify Jesus now – every moment of this life – until the day that Jesus returns, which *will* happen. So rather than seeing the delay of Jesus' return as an excuse to sin, we are to wait, watch, and work, and thus bring glory to Jesus with our lives until the very moment he comes back. Remember what the Apostle Paul said:

"Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him." (Romans 12:1-2, nlt)

We are to worship Jesus with every moment of our lives until he comes back.

"It is only fitting that (Peter) finishes with a confident exclamation of glory and praise to Christ and the glorious unending day when Christ will indeed return."

Pray

Let me close our time in this series by saying this again, because, as Peter said, "It is good to be reminded of these things:" -

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