Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

What we have learned in this sermon series is that a chief focus of 2 Peter is the Second Coming of Christ. And we have seen that His return will bring about the Day of Judgment, which will include the burning of the universe and the earth, resulting in new heavens and a new earth. And the certainty of His coming was meant as an encouragement for believers. Christ will keep His promise to return. And we saw last week that life on the new, purified earth, with Christ and all His people, will be absolutely wonderful! We should yearn for eternal life with eager anticipation.

But another focus of Peter’s letter is **how believers who expect Christ to return ought to live**. And we have seen in the letter that there is a certain way of living that keeps us from being ineffective and unfruitful and instead confirms our calling and election. And we have seen that there will always be false teachers who deny the return of Christ and judgment, and that many who profess faith will follow them. And we have seen that the only things that will survive the great burning of Judgment Day are the obedient works done out of love for Christ. And we saw last week that how we ought to live is described in these closing verses as ‘**waiting for**.’ But it is not the waiting of lying about and doing nothing, it is an active waiting. Sometimes we describe a person as “**full of beans**.” Have you heard that saying before? They cannot stand or sit still for long; they are always busy and moving and active with one thing or another. Well, the believer who expects Christ to return soon is a ‘full of beans’ type of person. And we see that in the three parts of this final section, as Peter calls us to **persistent purity and peace**, **earnest effort and evangelism**, and **steadfast stability and study**. Let’s take each of these in turn:

1. In verse 14, we see that we are to be people of **Persistent Purity and Peace**.
   1. And I use the word **persistent** to capture a repeated emphasis of Peter’s letter. Here in verse 14 we see it in the words “*be diligent*.” Back in 1:5 it was “*make every effort*,” and in 1:10 it was “*be all the more diligent*” and “*practice these qualities*.” And again, this is not about how we earn our salvation. Peter wrote to those who “*have obtained faith … by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ*.” So, our sins *are* forgiven, we *are* justified, which we receive by faith in Christ. What these phrases are about is **sanctification**, our growing in holiness, our becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit within us, but we are called, right throughout Scripture, to apply ourselves to spiritual disciplines and to resist temptation.
   2. And we see that here with the call to “*be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace*.” Now, this is not a call to be perfect. **1 John 1:8** says, “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*.” We will not be perfect until we are with Christ in heaven. But we should pursue growth in godliness and peace in our relationships.
      1. And the way that Peter describes godliness here is “***without spot or blemish***.”
         1. And this is Old Testament sacrifice terminology. If you brought an animal to the temple for a sacrifice, it had to be an animal without spot or blemish; in other words, without any defects. And first and foremost, this was a concept that pointed forward to Christ. Because we are defective sinners, who are covered in the ‘spots and blemishes’ of our sins, we need a Saviour who is pure and clean, who is without any sin. And Jesus is that Saviour. We see this in **1 Peter 1:18-19**: For “*you were ransomed … not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*.” So, it is in Christ, or through faith in Christ, that God views us as “without spot or blemish.”
         2. But we are to pursue “*being without spot or blemish*.” Have a look back at **2 Peter 2:13**. There Peter described the false teachers as “*blots and blemishes*,” same language. And this revealed itself in their sexual immorality, their despising of authority, and their greed.
         3. So, if we are to be diligent to be found by Christ “*without spot or blemish*,” then we should **avoid every type of sexual immorality**, whether that is pornography, lustful thoughts, adultery, same-sex desires and activity, sex before marriage, and every other sexual immorality that God forbids. While our world says, ‘Anything goes,’ we should value sexual purity.
         4. And **submitting to lawful authority** should also be an attitude we work hard to cultivate. The Greek word translated as obey is *hupakuoh*. It literally means to under-listen, or to hyper-listen. So, whenever someone in authority requires something of me, I am not first coming back with my view or quick to demand my rights or looking for ways to get out of doing what they require, but instead I hyper-listen or listen under. Looking to Christ as the super-submitter, I ask the Lord to help me hear in humility. I ask Him, how can I submit in this situation?
         5. And rather than being greedy, we must cultivate **contentment**.
            1. And this is a real challenge in our materialistic culture. We constantly see Ads that tell us that our Iphone or TV or car or washing machine or wardrobe is so 2021. We need a new one. And we deserve more pay. And we have a right to this benefit or that entitlement or this service or that holiday package. And we shouldn’t have to put up with inconvenience or imposition or illness. And we deserve it all now!
            2. One of the Bible verses that is so often quoted out of context is: “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*.” Athletes have it on their wrist band as some sort of promise that by Christ’s strength within them they can kick the winning goal or win the race, etc. But the verse comes from **Philippians 4:11-13**, where Paul said, “*I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me*.” So, the verse is actually about contentment, in good times and bad times. And we must cultivate or learn contentment. So, don’t upgrade your phone, just because there is a new one. Be thankful for what you have. Be generous with what you give to the Lord and what you give away to others.
         6. And so, as examples of what it means to “*be found without spot or blemish*” by Christ when He returns, avoid sexual immorality, submit to lawful authority, and learn to be content.
      2. But notice also that we should want to be found by Him “***at peace***.” And because “*we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ*,” what is in view here is more likely peace in our relationships with others.
         1. **Romans 12:18** says, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all*.” So, we try and sort out disagreements, if at all possible. We may not get there. And that is OK. But we must try.
         2. **Matthew 5:9** says, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*.” So, I go to my brother when I believe he is in sin. And I receive my brother if he thinks I am in sin. And I assist brothers and sisters if they need help to be at peace. And again, we may not always get there, but the Lord calls us, if possible, and as far as it depends on us, to seek peace.
2. So, believers who expect Christ to return must be persistent in purity and peace. But secondly, we see from verses 15-16 that there should also be **Earnest Effort and Evangelism**.
   1. Peter says, “*And count the patience of our Lord as salvation*.” And this is a reference back to verse 9, where Peter said, “*the Lord is not slow to fulfill promises as some count slowness but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*.” The false teachers of that time viewed the ‘delay’ in Christ’s return as slowness, and seized on it as an opportunity for lawlessness. They thought they could sin as they pleased because they didn’t need to fear judgment. But Peter said that the ‘delay’ is **not about slowness but about salvation**. And when we looked at that verse, we saw that it is because Christ will not return until the last of those whom God has chosen to salvation come to faith and accomplish all that He has planned and purposed for them. So, God cannot bring that date forward just because some might think it is taking too long.
      1. Let me put it like this, what if God had decided to be done with it and send Christ back in 1925? None of us would have been born and none of us would have gotten to enjoy heaven.
      2. And while the world is busy telling us not to have children because it is bad for the environment, surely one of the reasons why Christians obey God’s command to “*be fruitful and multiply*” is the hope that **our children** **will also get to enjoy heaven**. And that is not to say that every child born to Christians automatically goes to heaven. But God is a covenant God, and He delights to work salvation in the children of believers, through faith in Christ. So, this is a wonderful encouragement to have children.
      3. But salvation is not just about our coming to faith, it also includes **sanctification**, as we saw earlier. And the patience of God gives us time to grow in godliness, to become more and more like Jesus, to experience more of His equipping grace and power. And that is why I called the first part of this point ‘earnest effort.’
      4. But we also need to think here of **the salvation of others**, which is why I have included evangelism in this point. I said a moment ago that Christ will not return until the last of those whom God has chosen to salvation come to faith and accomplish all that He has planned and purposed for them. Well, Christ has not come back yet, which means …? That there are more out there who must still come to faith. And how do sinners come to faith? **Romans 10:17** tells us: “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*.” **Romans 1:16** says the same thing: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*.” And this is a task that belongs to all of us. And what a wonderful and powerful encouragement to share the gospel with others – maybe they are one who the Lord will bring to salvation through your sharing of the gospel!
   2. Well, before we move on to our last point, in the rest of verses 15-16, Peter refers to **the letters of Paul**. He says that Paul says the same thing in his letters. He says that there are some things in Paul’s letters that “*are hard to understand*,” which is really quite comforting to hear from Peter, isn’t it, because there are some parts of Paul’s letters that are tricky to understand and interpret.
      1. And perhaps one of the more obvious examples of this is **Romans 9-11** and the place of Israel in God’s plan of salvation. The question Paul asks is: Has God rejected Israel? And Paul’s answer is No. And he explains it by saying that there is a partial hardening of Israel “until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in.” And they will be once again grafted into the Christ the branch, “and in this way all Israel will be saved.” And there have probably been more words and more opinions about what this means and how and when it will happen, than of any other part in the Bible.
      2. But remembering that really important principle of Bible interpretation, which is that we must **let the plain interpret the less plain**, Peter helps us understand Paul, because we have learned here that Christ will not return until every last Gentile or Jew, whom God has chosen in Christ, comes to faith in Christ. And so, it does not matter if we can’t quite work out or agree on all the details of exactly how this works out and when, so long as we believe that all the elect will come to faith in Christ before He returns.
3. So, believers who expect Christ to return are called to persistent purity and peace, and earnest effort and evangelism. But thirdly and lastly, they are called also to **Steadfast Stability and Study**.
   1. Steadfast stability is about **verse 17**: “*You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability*.” And looking back to **verse 16**, it seems that the false teachers were twisting Paul’s teaching about how we have been set free from the law to support their ‘sin does not matter’ sermons. And **this type of thinking is** **extremely dangerous**, even for believers. Back in 1:10, after calling on believers to make every effort to supplement faith with virtue and knowledge and self-control and steadfastness and godliness and brotherly affection and love, Peter said, “*For if you practice these qualities you will never fall*.” And we saw then that Peter was speaking from bitter experience as one who had fallen or lost his stability. And he did this when he denied Jesus three times. And he wanted believers to avoid making the same mistake that he had made. You see, when we listen to false doctrine, we can lose our stability on the pathway of the Christian life. So, we could almost put it as simply as this, **if the preacher you are listening to places little value or emphasis on the law, do not listen to him**.
      1. Now, hear me very carefully, brothers and sisters, to preach salvation by keeping the law is wrong. And to say that we are saved by faith in Christ and then spend 2 hours piling up a long list of things to do and not do is also wrong. So, none of this is in any way meant to minimize salvation by grace alone in Christ alone.
      2. But can someone tell us **the three parts of the Heidelberg Catechism**? 3 Gs – Guilt, grace, and gratitude. 3 Ss – Sin, salvation, service. And where is the law explained? In the *gratitude/service* section. We have already learned how we are saved and that it is by grace alone. Obeying the law has to do with how we show our gratitude for salvation.
         1. **Question 115** puts it like this: “Why does God want [the Ten Commandments] preached so pointedly?” And the implication is, of course, that God *does* want the Ten Commandments preached pointedly, which means intentionally and meaningfully and regularly and with application for how we are to live.
         2. And the answer is “First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness. Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.”
         3. In other words, the ten Commandments are to be preached pointedly **to keep us from losing our stability**. And that is why “the error of lawless people” is so dangerous, and why we should seek preaching and teaching that is both who you are in Christ *and* how you must live for Christ.
   2. And that brings us, finally, to **verse 18**, where Peter says, “*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.” The first sermon in this series was called ‘The Importance of Correct Knowledge.’ And we said then that because Peter was soon to die, he wanted believers to have his letters, written down in black and white, that they could keep reading as an aid to faith and godly living.
      1. And we noted that there will always be false teachers, so we need to go back, again and again, to the reliable and trustworthy word of God. And that is why we have repeatedly talked in the sermon series about the importance of preaching and Bible study participating and reading Christian books.
      2. But notice also that Peter speaks of **knowing a person**, the Lord Jesus Christ, and His grace. So, while knowledge must be about facts and doctrine, like the certainty of the return of Jesus, it must also be personal and emotional, and about relationship and obedience.
         1. And this happens when ‘Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins’ becomes Jesus died on the cross for the forgiveness of MY sins.
         2. And this happens when ‘Jesus is going to return to earth’ becomes My Saviour and Lord will return to earth, and I want to “*be diligent to be found by Him without spot and blemish and at peace*.”
         3. Do you have this type of knowledge? Are you growing in the knowledge of the grace of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?
      3. If you are, then you will **burst out in praise**, just like Peter did at the end of his letter: “*To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity*.” You will be so thankful for salvation and the prospect of eternal life with Him, that you will love to praise Him and love Him whom you praise!

Brothers and sisters, young people and boys and girls, praise God for 2 Peter. Praise God that we have it in our language so that we can read and study it. May we be 2 Peter believers, to the praise of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer:

*Father in heaven, we look forward to the coming of Christ. And we want to be found by Him without spot and blemish and at peace. We do count your patience as salvation. We thank you for working through Peter, by your Spirit, and copyists and translators, down through the centuries, that we might have this letter to read. Please keep us from being carried away by the error of lawless people, and losing our stability, and cause us instead to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*