

THE IMPORTANCE OF LAST THINGS  
2 PETER 1:12-21

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

I met this week with my living trust lawyer. It had been seven years since Suzy and I set up this trust. Since she has passed away, it seemed like a good thing to update this legal instrument. If you are in the second half of your life and have some financial assets, it is recommended in the state of Nevada to have a living trust. It is a good thing to do for your family. This commercial is brought to you by the Nevada Lawyers Association. When you visit one of them, mention my name and hopefully they will give me my promised 5% commission.

It is at least a wise thing for pretty much everyone to have a will. If your resources are limited, I have free Nevada will forms which I am happy to give to you. They have been used by people in the congregation and been found to be legal.

Going about this process is a somewhat solemn thing. The lawyer asks questions about end of life decisions. What do you want to do if you are incapacitated? Whom do you want to be making decisions for you? All of this is a reminder of one's mortality. Life is short. Our existence on this side of the grave has a limit. We don't know what that limit is. It can come suddenly, as it did with my wife who died of a heart attack. There are two or three of us in the congregation who are in the last quarter of our lives. It is good for us especially to consider the importance of last things.

We have been looking at the short New Testament book of 2 Peter. The apostle wrote this letter from Rome to Christians probably in the 60s AD. Nero was the Roman emperor. After Rome burned in 67 AD, he blamed Christians for it. Peter may have been caught up in this persecution. He may even have been a prisoner when he wrote this letter.

Realizing that his earthly life was nearing an end, he wrote about last things. In his first letter he warned fellow Christians about dangers to them from without, about persecution. In this second letter he warns Christians about dangers from within, about leaders who would lead them astray by wrong teaching and wrong behavior. So we are going to consider today what he has to tell us about last things.

I.

In vv. 12-15 of #1 the Apostle Peter speaks about THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR LEGACY. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR LEGACY) In v. 12 he writes, **“Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have.”** The “these qualities” which Peter is referencing are the spiritual items which he referenced in the first part of the chapter, things like salvation, divine power, and knowledge of God's promises.

Especially prominent are the virtues which he listed in vv. 5-7. These virtues were faith, moral excellence, knowledge of God, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly love, and *agape* love.

Peter is wanting to remind his readers of these things. They already know about them. Peter and other Christian leaders have brought these things to their attention in person or by letter. Reminders involve repetition. Repetition can strike us as boring. We have already heard these things before. But there is value in repetition and reminders.

In an article last October in *Psychology Today* Professor Shahram Heshmat mentions two benefits of repetition. First, he says, **“Repetition is the foundation of mastery and the pathway to success in any field. Repetition allows you to turn the mundane into the extraordinary.”** Second, he says that repetition builds habits. He writes, **“Repeat experiences lead to progress. As you repeat something over and over again, it becomes ingrained in your subconscious, allowing you to act on it without conscious effort.”**

Thus for us Christians there is value in church attendance. Many of us have been going to church for decades. There may be little that we find new on any given Sunday. But we need reminders of stuff. Repetition is good. It is good to keep reading the Bible and to memorize parts of it. This repetition and these reminders become especially important in the crises points of life. They help us to handle opportunities and joys and seeming tragedies. Our response in these situations becomes part of our legacy. Our friends and family and even enemies will remember how we responded in these inflection points of life.

Peter adds in v. 13, **“I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder...”** There is a hint here that Peter is realizing that he is nearing the end of his earthly life. So he is looking at the big picture. He has an appreciation of the limited time which he has left.

Our translation uses the term “body.” The Greek text more literally says “tent.” That is a significant word choice. It creates in our minds the picture of a structure which is not permanent or solid. It is temporary by components and purpose. Such is the nature of our earthly bodies. So Peter wants to stir up his readers by means of this letter and by whatever other opportunities he may have to communicate with them before he dies.

Keep in mind that Peter is writing to address a situation where false teachers are threatening to lead Christians astray. We don’t know the exact nature of this false teaching. But it is concerning to Peter. So he is giving them reminders of foundational truths, so that they are not swayed by theological error.

He continues in v. 14: **“...since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me.”** Here we have a clear indication of Peter’s awareness of his life situation. He compares his impending death to taking off clothes. It will not be a tragedy for him. It will be a graduation to a new situation which

will all be good. A Roman writer by the name of Seneca who was a contemporary of Peter and Paul wrote, **“Christians and idiots do not fear death; why cannot reason attain to the same assurance as folly has?”** Such was his opinion of Christianity. But such also was the recognition of the assurance that Christians have about life beyond the grave.

It is not clear to us how the Lord Jesus made it clear to Peter that his death was near. After His resurrection Jesus told Peter (JOHN 21:18), according to John #21 vv. 18 & 19, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.”** (JOHN 21:19) **(This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’**” So Peter had certain information from Jesus about the length of his life and a bit about the nature of his death. Tradition says that he was crucified upside down, because he felt that he was not worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus. But how Jesus had made it clear to him that death was near is not obvious. My guess is that it was due to the simple recognition of his circumstances. Perhaps he was already a prisoner dealing with a hostile government.

He continues in v. 15, **“And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.”** In the remaining time which Peter has he will take advantage of all communication opportunities. This letter is part of that legacy. The focus of Peter is not so much on himself. It is more on his Savior and His teaching and His greatness.

Such is the model for us and the importance of our legacy. There are practical things that we can do like having a will or a trust. We can make provision for our loved ones after our death. We can invest our time and resources and knowledge into the lives of others.

Peter Lynch (PETER LYNCH) was the manager of the Fidelity Magellan mutual fund for 13 years. During his tenure the fund produced an annual average return of 29.2%. He retired in 1990 at age 46. His father had died young, and Peter Lynch did not want to spend the remainder of his life just trying to make money. One of his famous lines was: **“I don’t know anyone who said on their death bed, ‘Gee, I wish I had spent more time at the office.’”** (*Time*, 4/8/1990)

So Peter Lynch devoted his time to philanthropic pursuits. He is a Catholic guy who takes his faith seriously. His wife died a few years ago from cancer. In the charitable foundation which he and his wife established they laid down their basic motivation with a quotation from Luke #12 v. 48. (LUKE 12:48) There Jesus declares, **“To whom much has been given, much will be required.”** Such is the value and importance of our legacy.

II.

In vv. 16-18 we are reminded about THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY. (II. THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY) According to v. 16, **“For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...”**

Here Peter seems to be answering the charge of false teachers. Christian leaders are being accused of promoting myths. The term “myths” in the New Testament always has a negative connotation. What these false teachers believed is not clear. It did include a conviction that there would be no Second Coming of Jesus.

Such is the belief of much of modern academia. Scholars generally recognize that there was a first century Jewish rabbi named Jesus. But with their anti-supernatural bias they conclude that the stories of His miraculous deeds must fall into the category of myth. Stories of miracles might convey some kind of religious truth or message. But they have no historical reality.

This thinking has seeped into the ideology of many seminaries and colleges which are called Christian. It has an impact on many pastors and teachers who come out of these institutions. Thus it is that a survey taken some years ago of 7411 Protestant clergy posed the question: “Do you accept Jesus’ physical resurrection as a fact?”

Fifty-one percent of United Methodist clergy said no, as did 35% of Episcopalians, 30% of Presbyterians, 33% of the pastors of the American Baptist Churches USA, and 13% of American Lutherans. There were similar responses to questions about the virgin birth of Jesus.

Clement of Rome was a church leader in the early second century. He addressed the same kind of problem in his era (2 Clement 13:3): **“...the Gentiles... turn to blasphemy saying that [the Word of God] is a myth and a delusion.”** Such is the teaching of some today who call themselves Christians and even pastors.

To confirm his authority as an apostle, a representative of Jesus Christ, Peter could have cited many things. He could have talked about the teaching of Jesus or the miracles which He performed. But instead he focuses upon the Transfiguration. Why would he not speak about the raising of Lazarus from the dead or the resurrection of Jesus? We shall see in a moment.

At the end of v. 16 Peter says, **“...but we were eyewitnesses of his glory.”** He is pointing toward his personal testimony. This is in regard to Jesus’ majesty and His “coming.” The Greek word for “coming” in v. 16 is *parousia*. That was a term used in the Greek world for the arrival of a ruler or a god. In #3 this *parousia*, this coming, is specifically associated with the Second Coming of Christ. Such is the reference here as well.

The term for “majesty” was used in the New Testament only of God or the gods. In Philippians #2 Paul says that the Son of God humbled himself and was born as a man. At the Transfiguration Peter, James, and John saw something of the glory of Jesus.

Verse 17 tells us, **“For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”** The reference is to the Transfiguration. We heard Matthew’s version of the story read for us a little while ago. The key verses in Matthew #17 are vv. 2 & 3 (MATTHEW 17:2): **“And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (MATTHEW 17:3) And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.”**

This was a glimpse that Peter had of Jesus in His restored heavenly glory. It was a glimpse of what awaits us in the heavenly kingdom of God. We should notice that Moses and Elijah were very much alive and active. How did Peter know that they were Moses and Elijah? I suspect that he heard part of their conversation, which made them clearly identifiable.

Just before this incident at the end of #16 (MATTHEW 16:28) we find Jesus telling His disciples this: **“Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”** So what we have next described in the text in Matthew is the Transfiguration. Clearly it is the fulfillment of the promise that the three apostles would have a foretaste of the coming of the kingdom of God.

This coming of the kingdom necessarily includes the return of Jesus to earth. We don’t know much about the teachings of the false teachers about whom Peter was concerned. But one of them involved disbelief in the return of Jesus. In the early church the Second Coming of Jesus was recognized as a basic and foundational teaching of the Bible. In the first universal church council held in Nicea in 325 AD this was recognized as a belief uniting all true Christians. (NICENE CREED) At one point this creed declares, **“He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and His kingdom will have no end.”**

The survey of pastors which I just cited shows that many pastors don’t recognize the first resurrection let alone a second one. The false teachers of Peter’s day had a hard time with this doctrine. Cults and Christian heretics today also have a problem with it. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Peter adds in v. 17 of our text that he not only saw this glorified Jesus along with Moses and Elijah, but he also heard the voice of affirmation from God the Father. This was the same voice which the apostles heard at the baptism of Jesus.

According to v. 18 Peter adds, **“...we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.”** We don’t know which mountain this was. That is not too important. The basic point for our purposes is that we

see something here of the importance of his personal testimony. Peter was an eyewitness of this event which has eternal significance.

We have not had that same experience. What Peter and James and John witnessed was unique to them. But all of us Christians have had our own experiences with Jesus that may be unique to us. Telling about these things is part of our legacy to our family and friends and church and community. We do provide the opportunity to share those things with our church family on the third Sunday of the month. Dan's brother's testimony last Sunday was a beautiful example of that.

As a pastor I have had the privilege of being present for some of the passages of saints from this congregation into heaven. Occasionally they have told me about glimpses that they have had of the heavenly kingdom. Jim Spruill was an example of that. He was a neat Christian guy who spent his last earthly days at the Veterans' Home. Before his death he had a difficult bout which he did survive. The next time I saw him, he said words to this effect: "Pastor, I had a glimpse of heaven. I was walking with Jesus in a beautiful grassy field with flowers. It was just great. I don't have the slightest worry about dying. It will be great." A week or two later he died and entered into this heavenly kingdom.

III.

In vv. 19-21 Peter tells us about THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SECOND COMING. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SECOND COMING) According to v. 19, **"And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."**

What is "the prophetic word?" Certainly it must include Old Testament prophecy, probably also the words of Jesus and the inspired words of the apostles. According to some Bible teachers there are over 300 Old Testament prophecies that are fulfilled in the First Coming of Jesus. There are also over 300 prophecies in the Old and New Testaments concerning the Second Coming of Jesus. Peter adds to this testimony the experience that Peter and James and John had on the Mount of Transfiguration. The promise is that Jesus is coming back.

Peter says that his Christian readers would do well to pay attention to this testimony. What the Bible and the inspired apostles tell us about Jesus deserves our attention. Some churches and denominations avoid talking about these last things in the Bible because Christians have different interpretations about how these things will come to pass. Talking about this subject could be divisive.

Peter appears to disagree with that approach. He says that the subject is too important. Understanding these last things and talking about them is like shining light in dark places. Attention to these last things should be given until the day dawns and the morning star rises. Venus has always been regarded as the morning star. The picture is

the dawning of the morning. But here the reference appears to be to the return of Jesus to earth.

The reference to the rising in your hearts is not real clear. Perhaps the idea is that when Jesus does return, we won't need the prophetic word. Our hearts will be enlightened by the Morning Star Himself. This event will strike home to our innermost being.

Verse 20: “.. **knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation.**” This seems to be countering the position of the false teachers who claim that the apostles are just giving their own interpretation of these visions or passages in the Old Testament. We teachers have a different understanding of these things than you apostles, including a belief in the Second Coming of Christ. Peter says that his teaching is not just a matter of interpretation. Jesus is coming back. The experience of the Transfiguration was an evidence of that promise from Jesus.

Then in v. 21 Peter writes, “**For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**” Here is an important statement about the inspiration of the Bible. The prophecies of the Bible, along with the rest of the writings that were included in the text of the Bible, were not just the product of fallible human beings. They were the product of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of the authors. The picture is that of boats on the sea being blown along by the wind. Ironically the Hebrew word for spirit in the Old Testament and the Greek word for spirit in the New Testament both literally mean “wind.”

There is a parallel here with the incarnation. The Bible tells us that the mother of Jesus was a real human being, a woman. But Mary was impregnated by the Holy Spirit. Thus we have both divine and human involvement.

So it is with the inspired writings of the Bible. God used human beings with different personalities living in different times in history in different circumstances to produce the Bible, which includes prophecy. Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel, and the apostles of Jesus had visions and direct communication from God and revelation from angels. The apostles also heard the words of Jesus and saw His miracles. Thus they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

The product of this inspiration and the immediate concern for Peter is prophecy about the return of Jesus and last things. At the end of Peter's life he wants his fellow Christians to regard these prophecies as something to which they should give attention. It should be the subject of their study, the subject of our study and meditation and hope. For the promise is that we are on the winning side. In the end we will be a part of the forces which defeat human evil and will participate with Jesus in the establishment of His kingdom upon the earth. It will all be great. In the midst of the difficulties of life and the approach of the end of our lives on earth, this is a great hope. Peter tells us in v. 19 that this is something that we do well to give attention to. It is not something that we should write off as too esoteric, too difficult to make sense of. God wants us to give attention to it.

So here is just a bit of the description that we have about the return of Jesus. Look first at these excerpts from the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah. (ZECHARIAH 14:2) In v. 2 we are told, **“For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle...”** Verse 3 (ZECHARIAH 14:3): **“Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle.”** Verse 4 (ZECHARIAH 14:4): **“On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west...”** It just coincidentally happens that geologists have discovered that there is a fault line that runs through the Mount of Olives.

Verse 5 (ZECHARIAH 14:5): **“Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.”** Verse 7 (ZECHARIAH 14:7): **“And there shall be a unique day, which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but at evening time there shall be light.”** Verse 8 (ZECHARIAH 14:8): **“On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea.”** Verse 9 (ZECHARIAH 14:9): **“And the Lord will be king over all the earth.”**

The end of the New Testament book of Revelation provides an overlapping description of the Second Coming and these last things. In Revelation #19 v. 11 (REVELATION 19:11) we read, **“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.”** Verse 15 (REVELATION 19:15): **“From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.”** Skipping over to #20 v. 4 (REVELATION 20:4) we find this: **“Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed... They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.”** Finally v. 6 (REVELATION 20:6): **“Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no power; but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years.”**

Peter wanted his Christian readers to know about this stuff. The Lord God of heaven wants us to know about this stuff. (PROJECTOR OFF) If we have trusted in Jesus, this is our destination. We are eventually going to have resurrected bodies that don't wear out. We will rule on earth with Him. It is all going to be really great. In the midst of the challenges and difficulties and tragedies of life, we need to have these last things in our sight. In the midst of the challenges of aging and the realization of our limited time this side of the grave, this is the great hope that we have. This is the importance of last things.