

## THE PRESENT IMPACT OF A FUTURE HOPE

2 PETER 3:14-18

Church, I want us to admit something right out of the gate this morning: most of us, actually, probably almost every one of us, wants immediate gratification in life. We are pleasure junkies, and we want our fix right now.

Just a few days ago I got this email in my inbox from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com):

*Hello, we noticed you recently experience poor video playback on Amazon Video during your viewing of Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice. We're sorry for the inconvenience, and have issued you a refund for your rental.*

Now, I could see getting a refund for Ben Affleck's terrible acting, or for the atrocious storytelling in this installment in the DC Comics Universe, but other than a couple of very small glitches, I barely noticed any issues in my video playback.

But the email and the refund was evidence to me of how demanding we have become when it comes to instant gratification. By itself Amazon has built its corporation off of instant delivery of exactly what people think they want. I mean, free two-day shipping is so five years ago. How about Amazon locker where you can order and pick up at a specific location within a few hours. How about same-day delivery for an extra \$10? Need that new 60" flat screen for the Seahawks game? You could order it at 10am and have it in time for the 1 o'clock kickoff. Apparently Amazon has recently even been experimenting with using drones to drop off certain types of orders in 30 minutes or less.

And it's not just Amazon. Whether we're waiting for youtube to load, or picking up our coffee at Starbucks after we ordered it through our app, or waiting for likes on our Facebook post, our connected generation demands instant results. Pew Research recently did a project focused on how instantly connected we are, and of several negative effects they found, two stood out: "a need for instant gratification and a loss of patience."

All of this results in a desire in us for "quick fixes" when it comes to satisfaction. Darrell Worthy, who is a professor of psychology at Texas A&M, commented in an article in the Boston Globe that we're more and more focused on instant gratification. We'd rather play a quick game on our phones, or surf social media, than read books or magazines.

He puts it this way: "A lot of things that are really valuable take time," "But immediate gratification is the default response. It's difficult to overcome those urges and be patient and wait for things to come over time."

Well, in a lot of ways, it's this instant gratification that Peter has been warning against in the last couple of chapters of his letter. This is the heart of what the false teachers he's been talking about were marketing. They were really promoting an instant gratification of every urge that comes along, a myopic focus on the now, with a neglect of the perspective that sees the 'then'. And this is the culture that we are swimming in, isn't it?

Into this short-sighted cultural landscape comes the gospel. A word to us that says that as much as Jesus has come into history in this age and there are unquestionable benefits in the present day for those who believe in him, the ultimate benefits, the ultimate realization of all that Jesus came to accomplish, still awaits a day that is coming. As good as the blessings of the gospel are for us right now, and they are surely good... forgiveness of our sins, freedom from shame, being made right with God, being adopted into God's family, God dwelling in us in the person of the Holy Spirit, and I could go on and on... these, the Bible says, are only the beginning, only a foretaste, only a present and partial experience of a full and future reality. The best is truly yet to come.

And what Peter has been reminding us throughout Chapter 3 is that this glorious Kingdom of God, this rule and reign of Jesus that has been inaugurated through his life, death and resurrection, has a certain future consummation when Jesus returns. And on that day of the Lord, Jesus will come in both judgment and salvation, he will come to destroy his enemies and save his people and establish his righteous rule in a new creation forever.

This is what all of history is moving towards. The story of Christianity is a story that has a definite and fixed purpose. History isn't stuck in a random pattern of chance where the outcome isn't known. Think about some of the philosophies of our world. Buddhism sees no ultimate outcome for history. Humans are bound to an endless number of rebirths that depend on an unattainable level of karma to escape. Naturalism sees history fixed by unpredictable and impersonal forces of nature - a history that is uncertain. But God's Word reminds us that history is moving toward a goal, a purpose, history is teleological, to use the philosophical term. There is a future day coming when God will transform his creation fully and finally into what it was made to be. And this is the great hope of the Christian, but it is also something we have to wait for. And that's hard for us.

But as Peter wraps up his letter to these churches scattered across Asia Minor, he reminds us that this future hope that we're waiting for has an impact in the present. Our hope that is yet to come in a future day changes the way we live today.

August 28th, 2004 was a day that changed my life forever, but the changes really started several months before that. You see, August 28th was my wedding day, but for months leading up to that day, both Eli and I were beginning to shape our lives in a way that was bent toward our expectation and preparation for that coming day. Financial decisions, especially big ones, weren't made independently any longer. There was a sense before we ever said our vows that our money wasn't our own. We started meeting with other married couples, intentionally asking them questions and seeking wisdom about marriage. There was an intentionality to how we talked about our plans, our goals, our expectations. My relationships with other girls that I had as friends changed. I made a conscious effort not to relate to them any longer as just my friend, but as our friend as a couple. In other words, even though we were still waiting to be married, we weren't husband and wife yet — the hope and expectation of that coming future reality, significantly changed our present living.

And that is exactly Peter's point here in these last five verses of his letter. He is trying to help us see how this future hope that we're waiting for, of the consummation of God's kingdom, isn't something we just hunker down and hang on for, it impacts our present reality.

And he does that by giving us four very clear imperatives. A lot of 2 Peter has been really hard to understand, really difficult to track Peter's logic and arguments - this text is nice because it is really straight forward. Peter tells us how to live in the waiting, and his exhortation is built around these four commands that we're going to see - how our future hope impacts our effort, our perspective, our endurance, and our growth.

#### 1. Our future hope impacts our present effort.

Let's read beginning at v. 14: "Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these (these being the promise of the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells that he's already talked about in v. 13), be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."

"In light of this great future hope, be diligent." If you have an NIV Bible this phrase is translated as "make every effort." We've seen it at points, but this is the great theme of Peter's letter. We know that because this theme of effort and diligence that he's ending with is also what he started with. Remember his words in Chapter 1 verse 5: "For this reason," he says, "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control," and so on. In other words, make effort effort to grow in your faith.

Then he uses the same phrase again in v. 10 of the first chapter, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your election and calling..."

There is an effort required of us in the Christian life. As we've seen in both of Peter's letters, and as we feel in our culture that we live in today, there is a tidal pull around us, a rip-current, that threatens to pull us out to sea unless we make an effort to swim the other way. The Christian life is not a matter of jumping into the river bound for glory and just floating along. No, in many ways we are swimming upstream against the current and pressures of the world, temptation, and our own sinful selves. Peter is calling us to a present effort in light of our future hope that produces in us a God-glorifying, Jesus-displaying obedience.

I don't want to lump all of you in with me, but I don't really like effort. I was just at Lake Chelan the last two days, and I really liked just laying out in the sun, reading my book. I like ease. I'm attracted by relaxation and repulsed by effort. And although there is certainly nothing wrong with healthy, appropriate rest and refreshment - in fact I think God commands it, we have to check how much our diligence in obedience to Jesus gets pushed aside by our temptation toward immediate gratification.

While we were living in China I would sometimes watch Chinese television, and there was one infomercial that would come on that would always send me into hysterics. You see, my college degree is in the area of the body and health and exercise science, and this Chinese company had this product on the market - and in fact I saw it in several gyms - that was essentially a shaking machine. The machine had a strap that you could wrap around your mid-section, or your thighs, or your arms, and once the machine was turned on it would vibrate the strap back and forth with the claim that this would shake the fat off of you. I would see older men in the park that couldn't afford the machine using the same concept with their own hands but patting their gut as fast as they could.

Well, needless to say, none of these ideas worked. We would love to bypass sweat when it comes to weight loss, but it's just not possible. In the same way, in our growth in Christ-likeness there is no easy and immediate road. We await the consummation of our future hope, when we'll be fully and finally rid of our sin, but in the meantime - effort is needed for us to grow up in our faith.

I want to ask you this morning - have you become lethargic in your efforts toward growth in your life? Maybe you came to Christ some time ago with great excitement and enthusiasm, reading the Scriptures and prayer seemed as easy as breathing, the lure of sin and

the bait of temptation held little attraction, but now you find yourself struggling to open the Word and hooked by sin - to you Peter says, "be diligent."

But diligent toward what? This is not just a blanket exhortation to "try harder." Because, you see, if you are struggling along this morning Christian - the last thing you need to hear is "try harder." That is just adding another burden onto your shoulders. Peter is not just telling you to pull up your bootstraps and get it together. Look at what he says here:

"Be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace." Peter isn't saying here, Jesus is coming back, so would you clean up your act. How many of you in your own effort can make yourself clean before God? None of you. This is the great truth of the gospel - if you're wondering what it means this morning to be a Christian, this is the very heart of it - our sin and rebellion against God has stained us. We're like Lady MacBeth with blood on our hands, unable to get rid of our spots before a clean, and perfect and holy God. But in Jesus, God has done what we couldn't do. Through his death on the cross, has cleansed us. He has thrown out our filthy rags and clothed us in his righteousness. And so now, in the truest way, if you've trusted in Jesus' righteousness and not your own, you stand before the Father without spot or blemish and at peace with him.

So what Peter is saying is not, "make every effort to be what you're not," no, he's saying be diligent to be what you are. Give everything you have to live out the reality of what God has already done in you, and will perfect in you at the consummation. Peter isn't intending to give us this motivation that says, "Uh oh, Jesus is coming back, I gotta do this right." He wants us to be motivated by the ultimate joy of Jesus finding us living as he redeemed us to be.

Think about the picture of marriage and engagement again. The reason I didn't go around running after other girls while I was engaged to be married to Eli wasn't that I was fearful of facing her wrath, but because I knew the joy that would come from living out fully in the present the reality of our future together. So Peter is calling us to a diligence in our walk that is motivated by the present joyful experience of our future hope.

This call to diligence and effort is a huge part of why we're studying the habits of grace together this summer....Intentionality that ought to mark our lives, and in fact must mark our lives, if we are actually going to grow as Christians....

So our future hope impacts our present effort.

2. Our future hope impacts our present perspective.

Look at v. 15 - "And count the patience of our Lord as salvation."

This is Peter's second imperative. He's telling us, as we live in between the times, in what we call the now and not yet of Jesus' rule and reign, in the engagement - awaiting the marriage, he's telling us that it's crucial for us to think rightly about God's character and his actions.

Earlier in Chapter 3 Peter pressed in on us that this delay in Jesus' return isn't due to his negligence, it's not because of his unfaithfulness, or some defect in his character. The reason we are still waiting for the consummation is because God is patient toward his creation. The overwhelming bent of God's heart is toward salvation and not judgment. Now there will be a judgment - Peter doesn't neglect that and neither should we - but we need to know and believe the patient heart of God toward his creation and toward us.

And this has a huge impact on us in the waiting. We have to rehearse this truth to our hearts. You see, the problem for these false teachers that were questioning Jesus' return was that they thought God wasn't acting. They saw a world around them that they thought was untouched by the hand and action of God. But what was Peter's argument. God has been acting, and he will yet act!

Christian, did you walk in this morning wondering where God is in your situation? Feeling like God is distant? That he hasn't acted and won't ever act? Well, Peter wants to remind you this morning that God has not stopped acting. God has acted cataclysmically at the cross in a way that transforms history, and he will act in power to keep you and save you for that day that's coming. Peter says that this is what Paul even wrote about, and we can see it when Paul writes in Philippians that the God who acted to begin a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ. And when he writes in Romans that the God who foreknew you, and predestined you, and called you, and justified you, in the end will also glorify you.

And so, in the present, what can seem like his distance from your longings, what can appear to be his silence, is actually his patience leading to salvation. Take Peter's word to heart this morning. What if you believed today that in God's patient goodness he is accomplishing his redemptive purposes in your life and in the lives of others in a way that you can't comprehend. Count the patience of the Lord as salvation. Consider God's deeds. Remember his character. As Ps. 107 reminds us, consider his wonderful deeds toward the children of men.

We live in the waiting, don't we. And in the waiting there is pain and there is suffering and there is trial. But Peter is reminding us here again at the end of his letter that God hasn't stepped out of the picture. In fact, in the person of Jesus he has pressed closer in that ever. And

this world of pain and sorrow will one day be swallowed up in Jesus' victory. Allow that future hope to shape your present perspective.

### 3. Our future hope impacts our present endurance.

Here is Peter's third exhortation, v. 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."

Take care. Literally, Peter says, "be on your guard that you aren't carried away..." When we're living in the waiting, we need to be anchored to something, don't we? And these false teachers that Peter has been countering throughout his letter, they were anchored only to their own imagination. And although they hadn't thrown out the Bible, they had co-opted it to justify their own ideals. This is what Peter means when he says that there are some things in Paul's letters that the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction.

And church, we have to humbly recognize our own ability to do the same. And this is why, church, I have said before and I will say many, many times again that this book - the Word of God to us, is the authority over us. We do not stand above this book and dictate its meaning and authority. It stands above us with the authority of the Creator to shape our thinking and our living and all that we are.

But Peter is pressing in this verse our need to be careful about losing our anchor not on a corporate level, but personally. You see, you cannot depend on me, or Pastor Mike, or any of your other elders, or your Community Group leader, or anyone else to be the anchor for you. As much as God has given us wisdom, and a place and purpose in your life, us and our understanding and unpacking of God's Word cannot replace your own value of it in your own life. A 45 minute sermon on Sunday will not anchor you in the whirlpool of false narratives that swirl around you from Monday to Saturday. You have to hold onto this book. Because this book is all about the true anchor that will actually hold you, Jesus.

*Point to Habits of Grace.*

And it's this Jesus that Peter finally points us back to in this broad final exhortation of his letter.

v. 18: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Growth only happens as we're planted in Jesus, and it's a work that his grace alone can accomplish. And this grace isn't in opposition with our own effort, but works in and alongside it. And do you see that this grace isn't just this abstract power floating about, untethered from

anything, waiting for us to grab hold of it? No, Peter says that it is the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This grace given to me and given to you is tied to a person. This Jesus who came to earth 2000 years ago - when God stepped down himself into his broken and sin-sick creation. This Jesus who lived a sinless, perfect life, a life of righteousness - and then went to the cross and died the death we deserved. But through his resurrection this Jesus put on display that present reality of his kingdom and kingship - a kingdom that is inaugurated but not yet consummated. A kingdom where we're in the engagement, but await the wedding.

And in the waiting, this is our ultimate goal. That as Jesus' disciples we'd grow to look more like him. That we grow to love him and know him and obey him and serve him in a way that puts on the display the present reality of our future hope. It's all about him. That's why Peter ends with this doxology:

"To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." Maranatha, come King Jesus.