

# A Growing Commitment

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in 2 Peter 3, 2 Peter 3, and we'll read again at verse 10.

Where Peter writes, Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells, and so on.

Last Friday afternoon, our postman, Calamean, he delivered to our house a very unusual gift, because this gift, it came in a long tube-like shape, and I assure you that I didn't buy it, and Alison didn't buy it either.

But when this gift arrived, I had no idea what it was or who it was from. Anyway, when I opened this partial, this long tube-like partial that was delivered to the house, I discovered that it was a large canvas print that was about 3 foot wide and 15 foot long.

[ 1 : 45 ] And it was so long that I took it down to the church, and I lay it along the hall, the hall floor of the church, and it's actually here, right beside me, along the floor.

And I took it down here in order to read it. And you know, to be honest, it's a very unusual canvas print, because it has pictures and poems, it has diagrams and descriptions, all about the second coming of Jesus Christ.

But at the top and at the bottom of this long, 15 foot long canvas print, there's this symbol, and it has words on it.

And the words are parousia, the return and presence of Jesus Christ. Parousia, the return and presence of Jesus Christ.

And you know, that's what the word parousia means. It means the presence of Jesus Christ at his second coming, where Jesus Christ will physically come again in the glory of his Father with his holy angels, and he will make his parousia known.

[ 2 : 46 ] He will make his presence known in order to judge the living and the dead. But you know, by searching the internet about this unusual gift that arrived at the door with no explanation, it seems that this 15 foot canvas print full of pictures and poems and diagrams and descriptions of the second coming, it seems to have been sent by a woman called Frances.

And this woman, as I discovered, she has written two books, and you can find them on Amazon. Volume one is called Parousia, Love's Light, and volume two is called The Book of Life.

And it actually turns out that she has a YouTube page as well. You can look that up as well. It's called Parousia, Peace for All Nations. And there's one video in particular entitled Parousia, Scroll of Life.

And it's actually a video of her opening and speaking about the copy, this copy of the 15 foot canvas print that she sent to me.

And I have to say, it's very interesting to look at it and read it and consider what it's saying. And it's very interesting to understand how her thoughts are of the second coming.

[ 4 : 01 ] Because what she believes is that at the second coming, it will be heaven on earth. Where there will be the healing of the nations and wars will cease and pain will be removed and suffering will end.

And Jesus will come and reign upon the earth. It will be heaven on earth. And when you watch some of the videos, that's why you hear that she has an urgency for Jesus to come again.

Because it will be heaven on earth. But not to be disrespectful, I would tend not to agree with such an interpretation of scripture.

Because what we see in this passage is Peter's understanding of the Parousia. Which is the biblical understanding of the Parousia. And what the biblical understanding of the Parousia is that when Jesus comes again, this world will not be heaven on earth.

Because as Peter repeatedly said throughout this last chapter, this world as we know it will be consumed by fire. And that's what Peter has repeatedly asserted and affirmed in the last chapter of his letter.

[ 5 : 13 ] Because as Peter writes, what was in many ways his farewell speech to the Church of Jesus Christ. Peter had experienced and as we know he had endured a lot of persecution since he took up his cross to follow Jesus.

But now as he's writing in a Roman prison, Peter has come to the end of his life and ministry. Because very soon we know that he's going to be executed by the Roman Emperor Nero for preaching the gospel.

And with his closing words, Peter wants to exhort and encourage the Church that their pain and persecution, it will come to an end. And the final consummation of this whole world will finally take place.

But between now and then, says Peter, Peter's telling us in his letter, keep praying, keep persevering, and keep preaching the gospel.

Between now and the second coming of Jesus, stay faithful, stay watchful, stay alert. And Peter said this because he had a growing concern that every Christian would be a growing Christian.

[ 6 : 20 ] Especially because there was a growing corruption within the Church due to false teaching. And so with these final words that Peter gives, Peter says that between now and the second coming of Christ, he says you're to seek to have a growing commitment to Jesus Christ.

Between now and the second coming, seek to have a growing commitment to Jesus Christ. And so this evening I just want us to consider Peter's final words under three headings.

Peter's final words under three headings. Predictions for the parousia, perspectives of the parousia, and perseverance until the parousia.

So first of all, predictions for the parousia. Look at verse 10. Peter says, But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Now for the past 2,000 years of church history, there have been many predictions for the parousia. Because many people have tried to prophesy and predict when the parousia will take place.

[ 7 : 49 ] And as we said, the parousia is the presence of Jesus at his second coming. But of course, every prediction of the parousia has so far been wrong.

And there have been many predictions for the parousia. Because there was Irenaeus, who was a well-known and well-respected early church father from the second century.

His prediction for the parousia was 500 AD. But that date came and went. There's also Pope Sylvester II, who claimed that the millennium apocalypse would begin at the end of the first millennium.

So it would begin at the 1st of January, 1000 AD. But as we know, that date also came and went. There was also a mathematician called Michael Stiefel, who calculated that the Day of Judgment would take place at 8am on the 19th of October, 1533.

But that date also came and went. There was also a man called Herbert Armstrong, who was a pastor. He was also a self-proclaimed apostle who made not one prediction for the parousia, but four.

[ 9 : 05 ] Because Herbert Armstrong, he predicted that Jesus would return in 1935. And then he predicted again, 1943. Then he predicted again, 1972 and 1975.

But those four predictions for the parousia also came and went. Then there was Sir Isaac Newton, who was a mathematician, a physicist, an astronomer, a theologian and an author.

And he was recognized as one of the most influential scientists of all time with his laws of motion and gravity. But even Newton got it wrong.

Because when it came to his prediction for the parousia, he claimed that Jesus Christ would return in the year 2000. And now in 2020, we're still waiting.

But, you know, there are predictions for the parousia which have been made for Jesus to return this year. There's a prediction that Jesus will return on the 22nd of July 2020, which is only a few days away.

[10:11] But, you know, predictions for the parousia are pointless. Because Jesus, as you know, he clearly told us that no one knows the day nor the hour.

Not even the angels of heaven nor the sun, but the Father only. Therefore, our responsibility is not to make predictions for the parousia, but to be protected at the parousia by being in Christ.

My friend, we're not to work out when Jesus is coming. But we're to make sure that we're ready when Jesus comes. That's why Peter, as we saw, we touched on it last week, Peter issued this call to repentance.

Reminding us that the Lord isn't working according to our timetable. And he's not going to fit in with our calendar. And the Lord isn't going to fall in line with our predictions of the parousia.

Because, as Peter reminds us, the day of the Lord is an appointed time. It's an appointed time which the Lord will keep. And it's an appointed time that we will not miss and we will not be late for.

[11:16] Because we will all be there. And it's an appointed time in which the Lord will decisively and definitively intervene in the affairs of this world. And the Lord will reveal his wrath and bring justice and judgment against sin.

It's an appointed time. And with that, Peter, he's pleading with us that we'll be ready. We'll be ready at the coming of Jesus through repentance.

That's what he says. He says in verse 8. Do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years. And a thousand years as one day.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise, as some count slowness. But is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. And then the heavens will pass away with a roar. And the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved. And the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

[12:21] Now when Peter says that Jesus will come like a thief, he asserts and affirms that there can be no predictions for the parousia. Because just like a thief, there's no certainty when Jesus will come.

But there are signs of his coming. There is no certainty when Jesus will come. But there are signs of his coming.

And you know, that's what Jesus spoke about in Matthew 24. Jesus said, Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, said Jesus, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

Therefore, says Jesus, you also must be ready. For the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Now in Matthew 24, Jesus, he's not only prophesying about the destruction of the temple, but he's also prophesying about his second coming.

And Jesus, he gives clear teaching about the doctrine of eschatology, the doctrine of the last days. Because Jesus says in Matthew 24, But you know, And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places.

[13:56] All these, says Jesus, are the beginning of sorrows. But you know, I believe that living in lockdown for the past three months, and the fact that our super fast, non-stop, 24-7 lives have come to a grinding halt because of an invisible virus, the coronavirus.

Do you know, I believe it has caused people to think more seriously about the second coming of Christ. And I'm sure it's caused people to think about what Jesus said there in Matthew 24.

Because Jesus said that there will be wars and rumours of wars. There will be famine and earthquakes. But he also said that there will be pestilences. And if you look up the word pestilence in the dictionary, you'll see that pestilence is a fatal epidemic disease.

And it's not what the coronavirus is. It's a pestilence. It's a fatal epidemic disease. And you know, my friend, there is no doubt, absolutely no doubt, that the Lord is speaking to us through this coronavirus.

And we have to be listening. The Lord is speaking to us, because even though, and the Lord is reminding us that even though there's no certainty when Jesus will come, this coronavirus is reminding us that these are the signs of his coming.

[ 15 : 23 ] These are the signs of his coming. Even though we don't know when he will come, they are signs and reminders that he is coming. And you know, this is also what Paul picked up on in Romans 8, where he says that the creation is groaning.

The creation is groaning because, and Paul says the creation is groaning because it's longing for the apocalypse. It's longing for the end. The creation is longing for the revelation of Jesus Christ. The creation is longing for the parousia to come. And you know, with all these signs of his coming, the wars and rumours of war, the famine, the earthquakes, the pestilences, with all these signs of his coming, we have been reminded that we need to be ready and we need to repent. We've been reminded that we need to be ready and we need to repent. Because as Peter reminds us there, the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. All should come to repentance. That means, my friend, you need to come to repentance if you haven't come yet. The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that you will come to repentance.

[ 16 : 38 ] And so there have not only been predictions for the parousia, but as we see, secondly, there are also perspectives of the parousia.

Perspectives of the parousia. We'll read again in verse 10. The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for the hastening of the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

You know, when we think about the second coming, and the day of judgment, and all that will take place, we often hear different words to describe it.

We hear the word, as we've got this evening, the word parousia, which emphasizes the presence of Jesus at his coming. But we also hear words like Armageddon.

[ 17 : 52 ] And the word Armageddon, it's actually a Hebrew word. It comes from the Hebrew Bible. It talks about the hill of Megiddo, and it's translated in Revelation chapter 16 to describe the day of judgment, this day of Armageddon, where the bowls of God's wrath will be poured out.

We also hear the word apocalypse, which doesn't actually mean the end of the world. The word apocalypse is the revelation. That's what the book of Revelation is.

It's a book of apocalypse. It's a book which figuratively and symbolically describes what will happen when God pulls back the curtain of this world in order to reveal his wrath and his righteousness.

It will be the revelation of God's wrath and righteousness. It will be the apocalypse. But another word we often hear in relation to the second coming of Christ and the day of judgment is the millennium.

The millennium. And this teaching about the millennium, it's based upon the words of Revelation chapter 20, where we're told that Satan will be bound for a thousand years and Christ will reign for a thousand years or he'll reign for a millennium.

[ 19 : 10 ] And Christians, they have debated over different perspectives of the millennium for centuries because there are three main views of the millennium.

There is what you would call postmillennialism, then there is premillennialism, and then there is amillennialism. And, you know, postmillennialism, which literally means after the millennium, meaning that Jesus Christ will return after this thousand-year period.

Jesus will return. Postmillennialists believe that Jesus Christ will come again to reign upon the earth after a golden age, a golden millennial period.

But, you know, postmillennialists, they don't interpret the 1,000 years literally. Instead, they say that the millennium began when Christ was raised from the dead and that we are actually already in this golden millennium age just now because the world, says the postmillennialists, they say that the world is getting better because of the preaching and the spread of the gospel.

And, you know, it's interesting that in the 16th and 17th centuries, many Puritans believed in postmillennialism. But today, postmillennialism is a minority view because many claim that the world is not getting better, it's getting worse.

[ 20 : 38 ] But, you know, actually thinking about that position, there has never been a time in our lives where the gospel has spread further and wider. And there's never been a time where the gospel has been translated into more languages.

And there's never been a time where the gospel is more readily available in all these different formats, whether digitally or written, in all these different Bibles. And so we, in many ways, according to the postmillennialists, we are in a golden age where the gospel is spreading. But then the second perspective of the parousia or the second perspective of the millennium is premillennialism. And this view teaches that when Jesus Christ returns, he will reign on earth for a thousand years.

And so Jesus Christ will come before the thousand-year period. It's premillennial. And some premillennialists, they believe that Jesus will reign in Jerusalem and the temple will be rebuilt. Some believe that the temple will be rebuilt. And then at the end of this one thousand-year reign on earth, Christians will then be raptured into heaven and the day of judgment will take place here. [ 21 : 56 ] So there's this thousand-year period between the coming of Christ and the day of judgment. There's a millennium between Jesus' coming and the day of judgment.

But then the third perspective of the parousia, which would be my perspective of the parousia, is amillennialism. And amillennialism literally means no millennium because the millennium is viewed as symbolic.

And that the millennium is taking place now. And it began at the resurrection of Jesus and it's still taking place now. It's not a literal thousand years, but it's figurative.

It's symbolic. And amillennialists believe that Jesus Christ is reigning in heaven at present. But the millennium, it will culminate with the coming of Jesus Christ and the consummation of this world. And for amillennialists, the second coming of Jesus, it's simple and straightforward. That's probably why I agree with this position. It's simple and straightforward.

[ 23 : 07 ] Because an amillennialist will believe that when the second coming takes place, there isn't a thousand years between Jesus' coming and the day of judgment. Rather, when Jesus comes, it is the day of judgment.

When Jesus comes, it is the day of judgment. And I would hold to that position. Because as Jesus said, when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, and he will sit on his glorious throne, all the nations, says Jesus, will be gathered before him.

And as Paul reminds us, everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account. And every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And as Jesus reminds us, as the good shepherd, he will separate the sheep and the goats, one from the other. And he will set the sheep on his right, and he will say, come you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from before the foundation of the world.

And he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. And you know, my friend, Jesus' words are so solemn.

[ 24 : 29 ] But they're true. And they're affirmed to us in the book of the apocalypse, the book of Revelation. We're told in Revelation chapter 20, we're told what John saw.

John says, I saw a great white throne. And him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away, there was no place found for them.

And John says, I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God. And the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life.

And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works. And John says, the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell were delivered up.

They delivered up the dead that were in them. And they were judged, every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. And whosoever was not found in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

[ 25 : 35 ] There's solemn, solemn words that remind us about the end of this world. But you know, another word that we often hear in relation to the second coming and the day of judgment is the rapture.

And the word rapture, it's a word which is often used by premillennialists. Because they say that the end of Jesus, at the end of Jesus, Jesus' reign on earth, his 1,000 year reign on earth, premillennialists say that Christians will suddenly disappear.

And they'll be raptured into heaven. And then the day of judgment will take place. And premillennialists, they base their understanding of the rapture upon Jesus' words in Matthew 24,

where Jesus said, two men will be in the field, one will be taken, one will be left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken, one will be left. And they believe that one will be raptured and the other will be left. One will be a Christian, the other will be unconverted. But you know, the rapture, the word rapture doesn't actually occur in the Bible. It comes from a Latin word meaning to carry off or to snatch away. But even though the word rapture doesn't occur in the Bible, the rapture is a biblical concept which Paul actually used to encourage the Thessalonians to remain faithful between now and the second coming of Christ.

[ 27 : 07 ] Because Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. At the end of chapter 4, Paul says, For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up. We will be raptured, says Paul. We'll be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so, we will always be with the Lord.

And what Paul makes clear is that the return of Jesus will be visible. It will be bodily. It will be the parousia. Where not before the day of judgment, but after standing at the judgment seat of Christ, after every knee has bowed, after everyone has given account to Jesus of their life here on this earth, Jesus Christ will then, as the good shepherd, he will separate the sheep who belong to him, who are at his right hand.

And whether they've been alive on the earth or been resurrected from the dead, Jesus affirms that they'll be raptured. They'll be caught up in the air to meet him. And they will go to be with him forever.

And you know, Paul, when he wrote to the Thessalonians and gave his explanation of the rapture, he concluded by saying, encourage one another with these words.

[ 28 : 39 ] Paul wanted to encourage the Thessalonians to remain faithful and to stand firm in their faith. And that's what Peter wanted too. Peter wanted the church to know that the day of the Lord is coming.

And he wanted the church to know that the day of the Lord should be a dread to the sinner, but a delight to the saint. Peter wanted the church to know that the day of the Lord should be a day of apprehension for the sinner, but a day of anticipation for the saint.

Because, you know, my friend, the day of the Lord, it will be a day of judgment for some and jubilation for others. It will be a day of victory and vindication.

It will be a day of restoration and renewal. The day of the Lord will come, says Peter, but make sure that you're ready.

Make sure that you're ready between now and the second coming, says Peter. You need perseverance. You need perseverance until the parousia.

[ 29 : 46 ] And that's what we see lastly. Perseverance until the parousia. So we've seen predictions for the parousia, perspectives of the parousia, and perseverance until the parousia.

Perseverance until the parousia. Peter says in verse 11, Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace.

Peter repeatedly says that when the parousia takes place, this world as we know it today will be consumed by fire. However, as we said, there are many people who have an interesting but an incorrect view that when the parousia takes place, it will be heaven on earth.

And that's a pre-millennialist view, that Jesus will come again and reign upon the earth and there will be the healing of the nations and wars will cease and pain will be removed and suffering will end and it will be heaven on earth.

[ 31 : 23 ] But you know, that doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense because of what we're told in 1 Thessalonians about the rapture where we're taken away from the earth.

And even what Jesus said in John 14, you remember those comforting words Jesus gave to the disciples in the upper room where he said that he will come again and take the disciples to be with

himself.

Jesus said, in my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you may be also.

But more than that, more than what Jesus said, Peter says here that when the parousia takes place, this world will be consumed by fire. And you know, Peter, he has emphasized this throughout the last chapter of his last letter.

He said in verses 6 and 7 that unlike Noah's day where the world was destroyed by water, Peter says, at the parousia, the heavens and the earth, they are being stored up for fire.

[ 32 : 33 ] They are being kept until the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly. And then Peter says in verses 10 to 12 that this world will be dissolved. He says that repeatedly.

And he says the world will melt away and the world will be burned up. And you know, that word, burned up, Peter uses it three times in verses 10 to 12.

And you know, it's a word that gives to us the image of a blacksmith. The image of a blacksmith who is holding a piece of iron in a hot furnace until it glows bright orange.

Until all the impurities are taken from it. And you know, that's the image that Peter is giving to us.

This world will be burned up, completely consumed by fire.

And you know, my friend, I would be more inclined to believe that those who are left behind at the day of judgment, after the rapture has taken place, after the Lord has taken his people to be with himself, I would be more inclined that for those who are left behind at the day of judgment, that this world will not become heaven on earth, but for a time it will be hell on earth.

[ 33 : 55 ] And that's why we need to be ready. That's why we need to repent. That's why we need to make sure that when Christ comes, we are awake and alert and we are committed to him.

And you know, Peter says here that even though all this is going to take place, even though the world is going to be burned up, Peter says we are to rest and rely upon the promise that there will be a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

And that's the apocalyptic image that John was given in the book of Revelation. He says in Revelation 21, I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

For the first heaven and the first earth, they passed away. They were done away with. The word passed away is in the sense of dying. The world died. It was put to death.

Then I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

[ 35 : 13 ] And God will do what, my friend? He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain for the former things in this world will have passed away.

They will have passed away. And you know, Peter's saying to us, you know, what a way to conclude his letter. Peter is saying to us that we are to rest and rely upon that promise.

We're to rely upon that promise that there will one day be a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells, where the Lord's people will be for all eternity, where we will be with Christ and see him face to face for the endless days of eternity.

But you know, Peter says, until then, until the parousia, until the presence of Jesus comes, until Jesus comes back, persevere until the parousia.

You need perseverance until the parousia. And just to summarize Peter's letter, Peter is saying you need perseverance until the parousia because with a growing corruption in the church, you need to be a growing Christian, growing in holiness and godliness.

[ 36 : 40 ] You need to have a growing conviction to live your life with an eternal perspective. You need to have a growing concern regarding your Christian character, conduct, and conversation.

And you need to have a growing commitment, a growing commitment to Jesus Christ and his church. You need perseverance until the parousia.

And you know, for his last word, in the last chapter of his last letter, the last thing Peter says to the church of Jesus Christ, verse 18, but grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now, both now and to the day of eternity.

