

2 Peter 3:3-16. Sunday 11th September 2022. John 20:19-31?
Climate Care 2 Talk. Also first Sunday after the Queen's death.
And a baptism – for Casper (Joep and Melanie's son).

2 Peter.

As a church seeking to be UP, IN, and OUT, how do our values connect to God's creation. especially our OUT - being involved in God's world.

We look to 2 Peter 3.

God's Perspective.

This letter speaks to those who think this world is pointless and those who think this world will simply go on forever. We need to understand God's perspective on the future, so life now, can be lived rightly, today, next week, next month...

There are false teachers challenging Peter – the apostle, and the author of this letter – his teaching on ethics and eschatology (eschatology means what will happen in the future). It addresses a difficult question raised by some that the second coming of Christ had been expected by the first generation of Christiana believers, and had not yet happened. These Christians were dying and there was still no sign of the Lord's return in judgment and glory.

From this fact – he had not returned – had led some to suggest that the expectation of the Lord's return was a mistake. There would be no judgment or divine intervention, but instead life would continue as it always has...

Peter responds - his counter argument is that those who deny the Lord's return, are mistaken about creation, mistaken about the Lord, and mistaken about discipleship.

1. Mistaken about creation.

The people challenging assumed that this creation is all that there is, and it exists independent of God. They did not believe or they were skeptical of the Lord's return, because, based on common sense, they would say, that the world continues on as it has always done. V4.

As the musical Annie – 'the sun will come tomorrow!'

People were saying, that the world goes on in a regular pattern. It has done so since the start of creation! God created these regular patterns and is quite happy with them. And this God would not intervene in such a Universe. The Universe is reliable, self contained and we can make of it what we want.

. V5-7. The Universe is not self sufficient, and independent. It depends and continues to depend solely upon the will of God. Paul mentioned by Peter, wrote to the Colossians: For by Christ all things were created: things in heaven and on earth... all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together''

Creation does not say that God will not intervene. It reinforces the view that God **will** intervene in the Universe. The world has not continued without intervention, and the same word of God, which created the Universe has said that judgement will come.

V5 can be translated, 'for in maintaining this, they overlook the fact.' The people have overlooked the nature of creation and God's action in the flood, the flood of Noah. God creates and God sustains but also he has given special evidence of special intervention, as shown in the flood. By his word and water, God created the universe, he intervened at the flood, and by the same word, and this time by fire, he will intervene with judgement in the future.

The phrase 'reserved for fire' is used. This is not about purification – like fire purifying metal. This however is not about fire to destroy the world. The image of fire – is an common biblical image of judgement upon those who are wicked.

When we hear about 'fire' it is possible images such as nuclear war or things we have read about power of sun, as shown in the film 2012. It may even line with some scientific thinking, of what may happen in billions of years.

It is important we do not lose the focus of the text, which is that of judgment. To be honest, it does seem less challenging to try and think that 'how could the earth will consumed by fire' than to see it as a message about judgement, which immediately asks us 'are you living in a way that gives God pleasure and joy?' In our baptism we heard it put another way: to follow Christ means dying t sin and rising to new life with him: do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God? Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil? Do you repent of the sins which separate us from God and neighbour?

Again it is important to consider. We have, as shown in the laws of physics, the regularity of the Universe. We can make predictions based on that. But we cannot build a theological picture of the future based on these. Such a view can forget – the laws are a description of God's faithful upholding of the Universe, and that the God gives regularity to the Universe, may at the same time, allow himself freedom to work within the Universe in acts that go beyond these regularities.

An example could be the 'resurrection'. It gives evidence that God can go beyond the constraints of the pattern of human life and death, to new creation, where death will be no more ('the

old order of things has passed away'). Paul teaches that the promise of the resurrection, is that there will be a new creation, because he is raised, we will be raised, Queen Elizabeth raised not because of all her good works but because of the grace of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Peter is saying: this creation is not an end in itself. And that God is both Sovereign in both creation and new creation.

2. Mistaken about the Lord.

Peter now addresses – v8-10 – the problem of the delay. His response – a mistake to judge God from our perspective. 'With the Lord a day is like a 1000 years and 1000 years are like a day.' He is saying to us: for some of us who find it hard to understand the delay, we have made the mistake of putting God into our human perspective than seeing human history from God's perspective. From the perspective of eternity, the delay in the parousia is only a short time. I remember chatting with someone about how life / time seemed to be getting faster. I think it was Annalyne. She said – to a child, who is say 7 or 10, one year, is a 10th of their life, or a 7th. It is lots. For me, in my late 40s, one year, is one 40 something!!!! From the perspective of say my life, one year, is only a short time... from the perspective of a child who is 7, that is one 7th of their life.

We can hold together a tension of an imminent expectation and the reality of delay.

But Peter goes further. For some, it is an intellectual idea. For others, it is deeply personal. It is a cry similar to Mary and Martha, if Lord you had been here, this would not have happened. But you had not returned and it happened or happened again...

Peter speaks about God's nature. What is God's motive in delay or acting? And can he be trusted? People were saying: God was not keeping his promise.

Peter says. The Lord is in control. The delay has a purpose he says: to delay the judgement in order to give opportunity for repentance. V9. The people were mistaken – they said the Lord was powerless and did not care. Peter says the opposite: the Lord has delayed the judgement, out of care for all.

And this return. Peter restates what the second coming will be like. He follows Jesus own words, using the image of the thief. The day will come suddenly, unexpectedly. The Lord does not reveal everything to use about time and place, and so we are unwise to criticize him, because he is not following our sense of time.

V10. This act of God will have a radical effect on the Universe. The heavens will disappear with a roar. The word 'roar' communicates hissing, rushing, cracking, roaring of flames. It can also refer to God's thunderous roar, which announces his coming.

The elements will be destroyed – it can refer to what we see on earth but also the word has been used for the heavenly bodies like stars, sun, moon.

The earth and everything in it, will be laid bare. This phrase has been translated in various different ways, in different bible translations. The KJV may be best known – burned up – but that is based on a translation from a word in a small number of manuscripts. The more likely word – found in many more and earlier manuscripts is reflected in the NIV we use here may have the best idea – laid bare – laid open, nothing hidden. Like a house that has been damaged by fire and the roof is gone and

some of the walls, windows, and so whatever is inside can be seen. Nothing is hidden from God's judgment.

Elements will melt in the heat. V12. We see in Isaiah 34 : All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall, like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree."

So what can be made of this cosmic dissolution? Think back earlier. The flood described in v4-7. The flood demonstrates a Creator who is able to work in human history in a dramatic and physical way. We see an intervention by God in the physical Universe accompanying a time of judgement.

Is this about, destruction of the present creation? No, the verses show a radical discontinuity between the old and new creation. But the language does seem to take us about 'renewal' and not 'abolition'. We read about a Creator who can be trusted, rather than breaking his promise, he keeps his promises and brings about a new heaven and new earth. He is powerful and free to act in both spiritual and physical ways in his creation.

If God acts at the beginning of creation, he should be able to act at other points in the Universe's history. Furthermore, a God who creates a world with no point or purpose, and without any judgement of moral evil, such a God is to be pitied than worshipped.

3. Mistaken about Discipleship

Mistaken about creation, mistaken about the Lord, mistake about discipleship.

V11-16 – we heard of the new heaven and new earth. V12 – the day of the Lord – is a reminder that the new heaven and new earth is a direct work of God.

Now a mistake can happen. If the images in this chapter are seen as the world / creation is destroyed, and God starting again, then it is possible to see us as having no Christian responsibility towards issues of justice and the environment.

You could hear someone say?: when if everything is going to be burned up, then there is no point looking at the atmosphere, or conservation or pollution. It is possible that those of us as baptized Christians, who enjoy the grace and good news of Christ, our sins forgiven as Christ took them from us, have we sometimes lost the sense of preparing for the new home that awaits us?

Peter asks the people listening – what kinds of people ought you to be – ‘since... these things will happen ‘ what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward...’

The future controls the present.

German theologian Jurgen Moltmann: “From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the future.”

We live our lives now in the light of the future reality. God’s new creation –the home of righteousness – and so now, we live holy and godly lives. V11. So justice matters – as the cry is commonly shared in the OT – and God’s refrain as he commands justice is – be holy as I am holy.

The rabbis considered what was the core of following God, and they settled upon 'be holy as I am holy'. So to be holy – you had to look at what God did, who he was and what he placed value upon. So for example, God is for marriage – Genesis 2. Also, he is for his creation – even before humans are created, he calls 'it is good'. He seeks creation to thrive and multiply. Be holy, as I am holy. Holy and godly lives.

If the nature of the new creation, will be 'home of righteousness' we are to live righteously to be ready for it.

So. We do not gaze at the future of the Universe and see it as pointless, we look forward to God's future and we live our lives in accordance with it. This creation is not the end of the story. As David Wilkinson says: those who put their trust in science or say the future does not matter, should remember the coming of the Lord.

Peter's final comment. Our Lord's patience means salvation. He refers back to the delay in the Lord's return. The Lord's patience, is not a disappointment, but it is in fact an opportunity. If this reality to come, we need to reflect the Lord's opportunity of offering salvation to others...

Conclusion.

We avoid mistakes about creation – the Lord sustains, he intervened before, he does and he will. It is a mistake to say everything will always continue as it has.

We avoid mistakes about the Lord – his delay, out of care and his return will have a cosmic effect, not just an individual effect.

We avoid mistakes about discipleship – the future shapes the present, we ought to live holy and godly lives as we look forward...

Shall we pray ...