

How Should We Then Live?

So, how many polls predicted a win by Donald Trump? As far as I could see, none of the American pollsters got it right. There was one from Britain, however, that did. It was done by the Democracy Institute, a London-based think tank that also accurately predicted the Brexit vote. They said on Monday that Trump had a five-point lead. Trump actually lost the popular vote but won the more important electoral vote by a final margin of 7%.¹ So, in the Bible, if a prophet got a prediction wrong even once, what should we do? Ignore him forever!

We've been studying the apostle Peter's prophesies. Actually, he's simply been repeating the predictions of the Bible prophets concerning our world's future. He said that when the Day of the Lord came, "...*the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved...*" (2 Peter 3:10) We would do well to believe these prophesies since these prophets have a 100% accuracy rating.

And then, Peter says: (2 Peter 3:11a)

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be...

That wasn't a relevant question for just the first readers of Peter's letter but for us as well. What sort of people ought we to be in these days of political transition and uncertainty, *since all these things are thus to be dissolved*? Jesus, through Peter, has a very clear answer. First, He says we should be...

I. Living Expectantly

To complete Peter's sentence, he said... (2 Peter 3:11-12)

...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!

The Greek here literally says, "...*what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holy behavior and reverent actions which people owe to God.*" 'Holy behavior' and 'reverent action...' does that describe your life this past week? Before you shake your head "NO!!" consider this: 'holy' means separated. It doesn't mean 'abstaining from everything fun because you can't pray and have fun at the same time!' Is that the idea you have of 'holy behavior'? Where did you get that idea? Here in this church? If so, I apologize! That's not what holy means!! One way of defining holy is to say, "holy is acting like Jesus." And Jesus liked to have fun! He could be serious when He was facing serious situations but He also really enjoyed life.

For example, Jesus loved kids. What do kids like to do? They like to play! Don't you think Jesus played with them? Jesus attended weddings and Jesus went fishing with the disciples and Jesus loved, loved, loved to eat with his friends and with his friends' friends. Have you ever had a meal in the home or in a restaurant of a Middle Eastern family? Oh, there's music and singing and dancing and lots and lots of laughing. One of the last things Jesus said to His disciples was this:

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11)

So, when your life is full of joy, THAT'S when you're living a holy life!

Now, did you notice that it said our lives should display *holiness and godliness, WAITING FOR AND HASTENING the coming of the day of God...*? I think we can all understand the waiting part of that, but what does it mean 'hastening' the day of God? How can we 'hasten' it? Isn't when that day comes totally up to God?

Apparently not. In Romans 11:25, Jesus says through the apostle Paul that...

...I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

So, we know that it's God will that we should 'make disciples,' right? Well, if there is a 'fullness,' a certain number of people who must be saved before Jesus returns, then the more disciples we make, the sooner He'll come. That's how I read this!

So, that's the first way we should live to be living expectantly. The second way is to be:

II. Living Wisely

Peter continues by saying...

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him... (2 Peter 3:14-15)

Notice that, while the first suggestion involves behavior that is productive, living lives that display holiness and godliness, the second suggestion is that we be diligent to be found "*...without spot or blemish, and at peace.*" It's perhaps still being productive but it's more about who we are than what we do. What is it that makes us spiritually dirty and takes away our peace? It's sin, right? And how does a Christian fall into sin? Peter's been harping on how powerful false teaching is to lead us into sin. But how does that really work?

In his book, *You Are What You Love*, James Smith tells the true story of the Arctic venture of the USS Jeannette, captained by Lieutenant George De Long in the 19th century. De Long's entire expedition rested on an image of the North Pole laid out in the maps of Dr. August Heinrich Petermann. Petermann had never been to the North Pole, so his maps were pure supposition. They suggested that there was a "thermometric gateway" through the ice that opened into a polar sea that provided clear sailing across the top of the world.

But following those maps, it turned out, De Long was heading to a world that didn't exist! Eventually, of course, they had to let go of their romantic ideas of how they hoped the Arctic would be and deal with the reality of how the Arctic really was. Once they made that decision, they chopped the ice off their boat, turned around and sailed home.²

Is anyone here on a relational sailing adventure like that? Someone showed you fantastic maps of a futuristic "good life" that drew you in. The journey would take you across a crystal-blue ocean on the top of the world. So, you set sail on the expedition of your life because these maps captured your imagination, your heart. But now, not having found the "thermometric gateway" or the crystal-blue ocean that the maps promised, you're chopping ice off your boat, hoping you can get it turned around before you're frozen there for the Arctic winter. You were deceived by untested and faulty maps.

That's the danger Peter is warning all of us about in the last paragraph of his letter. Speaking of those who purposely twist Scripture to get it to condone their own fanciful or sinful behavior, he warns:

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. (2 Peter 3:17)

“But,” you might say, “how can we verify the maps, the paths to the future that people entice us with? We can’t test out every map! How do we know whether someone’s map is legitimate or faulty? Some of the map salesmen even claim to be Christians!”

Yes, they do, and Peter gives us the key to discernment in verse 17. He says, “...*take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people...*” What kind of people? Lawless people – people who disregard the law. What law? The law of God, the commands of God. Here’s the proper use of the Law of God for the Christ-follower: the purpose of the Law of God is to show us sin. It cannot remove our sin, but it can show us what is and what isn’t sin.

So, let me give you an example. Someone sends you an unsolicited email about how you can double your money in six months using his proven method of investment. You’ve been losing money and really want to get back even so you make contact and learn that, while in Connecticut this technically isn’t legal, he’ll take care of everything by covering your tracks so the IRS won’t see it. Should you set sail on that financial voyage? NO!!! Why not? Because God’s Word warns against it in multiple places like Prov. 10:2:

**Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit,
but righteousness delivers from death.**

Or even, what about the very concept of ‘getting rich quick’? Does the Bible speak of that? It does in Prov. 13:11:

**Wealth gained hastily will dwindle,
but whoever gathers little by little will increase it.**

Do you see it? The ship he’s promoting is taking you to Arctic winter! Don’t get on it!

And living wisely also includes great doses of patience. The phrase Peter uses is, “*And count the patience of our Lord as salvation...*” He’s pointing to Jesus’ delaying His return as not being a negative but a positive. It’s somewhat negative for believers because we have to deal with the hardships here longer. But it’s a huge positive for those who haven’t yet received God’s grace because it means they have one more day to decide to receive it.

The Greek word translated ‘*patience*’ is *makrothumian* which is a compound Greek word made up of *thumia* which means suffering or sacrifice and *makro* meaning ‘an extension of time.’ (Am I sounding like the father in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*? Remember him? To him every English word came from some Greek word. Anyway...) So the Greek word translated ‘*patience*’ literally means ‘macro-suffering,’ sacrificing over a long period of time. So Jesus is literally torn between coming and rescuing us and patiently waiting so that there will be more people whom He can rescue.

Do you have this same patience in suffering that Jesus had while on this earth and still has today? Are you willing in a relationship to sacrifice, to suffer, even over an extended period of time for the spiritual benefit of another? I know of several people who have truly suffered in a marriage relationship purely for the spiritual benefit of their spouse. The common thinking today, even with many Christians is, “I just can’t take it anymore! They’ve sinned against me for the last time! I’m out!” But isn’t that exactly what we did to Jesus before we were saved? He didn’t have to stick with us until we repented. We were guilty. But Jesus had the attitude of *makrothumian*, macro-sacrifice. Not everyone can do it, but if you do, without question you will receive a special reward in heaven. Jesus Himself promised it to those who suffer. He said:

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer... Be faithful... and I will give you the crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10)

Living wisely means you'll be diligent and careful not to be carried away by lawless people and that you'll highly value the *makrothumian*, the macro-suffering of Jesus as model for your own life.

So, Peter has challenged us to live expectantly and wisely and finally, to be...

III. Living Large

In the last verse he says:

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

When you were young, did you ever walk around in your dad or mom's shoes? Do you remember doing that? I remember doing that and thinking, "Wow! I'll never have feet that are this big. Never!" Did you ever think that? Now, my feet are actually bigger than my dad's.

You know, it's normal to grow, isn't it? If your body doesn't grow, there's something wrong, you're not healthy. (I'm talking about growing UP, not OUT, okay?)

So, Peter's last words were '*grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior...*' What does that represent, the 'grace and knowledge' of Jesus? It represents knowing two critical realities about Jesus: Who or what He is and how He lived. And apparently these two realities are so huge, so complex, so magnificent that we can grow in our understanding of them all our lives and we will never come to the end. The knowledge part is the content, the head stuff, the understanding part. But the grace is the experiential, the relational, the living-together part.

So, how are you doing with that? This question isn't: "Do you know Jesus?" The question is: "are you GROWING in your knowledge of Jesus and are you GROWING in your experience with Jesus?" You see, some of you are feeling kind of stale in your friendship with Him, aren't you? You're almost at a point of boredom. You like Him, you know stuff about Him, but what you know about Jesus really hasn't changed much in like the last several decades. What you know about Him is what you knew twenty, thirty years ago.

And others of you maybe know more, but it's like having a relationship with a famous person: you know tons of stuff about them but you don't feel like they really know you. You don't have any experiences with them. Is that how your friendship with Jesus feels to you today?

I read an article this week by a woman named Ginger entitled, "Bored with God." She wrote that she was sitting on the beach while her grandkids were playing in the sand and she started thinking about her relationship with God. She thought about how exciting it had been when she first became a Christian and how it was like when she first met her future husband. She remembered how she couldn't stop thinking about him or talking about him ("Scott would love that shirt... Scott thinks... Scott says... Scott, Scott, Scott..."). It used to be that way with Jesus ("That reminds me what Jesus says... That reminds me of what Jesus did... Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.") She thought, "What's happened between me and Jesus? Why am I so... bored?"

She writes, **Acknowledging my own spiritual boredom that day on the beach became a significant turning point in my relationship with God. I think it was so powerful because I was finally honest with myself, and with my Creator. It's funny that I hid that truth deep inside for so long, thinking that if I didn't acknowledge it then no one – including God! – would know. But it was only when I finally got to the end of myself and spoke the truth that God said, "Finally! NOW I have something to work with. Let's get started!"**

So, God led her over the next several weeks to recognize several truths. First, she wasn't bored because God had changed. Secondly, she wasn't unfulfilled because He'd stopped working in her life. So, thirdly, she was the one who needed to start "showing up" in the relationship. She also realized that, just as was true with her relationship with her husband, the "tingling feelings"

of their early relationship were not really as important as the deep, mature realities of what her marriage relationship had become. Seeing her husband walk through the door at the end of the day no longer made her knees weak. But it did make her heart grow warm because of what his simple presence reminded her of – his friendship, his patience, his sacrificing love that so tenderly cared for her when she was sick, his deep forgiving love when she had failed. How had she forgotten these things about Jesus?

So, her first remedial step was to talk to Jesus. (That’s always a good first step, isn’t it?) She asked Jesus to make her more aware of His presence each day. That’s it! That’s all she prayed. But how God answered! She writes:

I started to... notice so many things I’d missed before. My world began to explode with God’s presence! He became my suitor, my pursuer... I Tim. 6:11 in the The Message says: “*pursue a righteous life – a life of wonder... Run hard and fast in the faith. Seize the eternal life, the life you were called to...*” There is never boredom in seizing a life of wonder.

The second thing Ginger did was she decided to change the routines of her faith. She started attended worship on Saturday night, instead of Sunday, to feel what the Jewish Sabbath that Jesus lived felt like. She writes:

...practicing Sabbath allowed me to recalibrate by entire life... On Sundays I was reading good books and napping and cooking and playing games (with the grandkids.) I was having fun – and it focused my mind more on the God of joy and play – such a different aspect of the Almighty...

The last remedial step God led Ginger to, to treat her boredom, was the most difficult. She realized that she couldn’t continue to multi-task and just put God in the mix. She realized that the busier she became, the less focused she was on any one thing or any one person. She became aware of how rude she’d become with other people – conversing with one person and trying to text another. And she writes:

...that’s what I’d so often done to God. I would do quiet times on the fly, or check my Bible app for the daily verse and then get to the important stuff of my day. It hurt to admit that! But that’s what my actions were showing my Father... So I decided to set some boundaries. Technology is great – but I only check it at certain times of the day, and no more. When I’m with other people, I... focus completely on them, actively listening and honoring who they are as God’s created and loved children. The more I’ve stuck to my boundaries, the more I see God’s amazing work and creativity.

After practicing these three disciplines for months, Ginger said she was no longer bored with God but enthralled with Him. She writes:

God never grows weary in pursuing us as his loved ones... He lavishes his love on us. And now... that I should become bored with God is a sheer impossibility! What a mighty God we truly serve.³

This is what it looks like to “*grow in the grace and knowledge*” of Jesus! And when you do, at the end of every day, as your head hits the pillow, you’ll say with Peter:

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Peter 3:18b)

Let’s pray...

¹ “Clinton or Trump? Poll that Accurately Predicted Brexit Predicts Presidential Winner,” Robert Jonathan, *Inquisitr*, Nov. 8, 2016

² James K. Smith, *You Are What You Love* (Ada: Brazos Press, 2016), p.21

³ Ginger Kolbaba, “Bored with God,” *Today’s Christian Woman*, Feb. 13, 2013 found on www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2013/february/bored-with-god.html