

Ending Well

2 Peter 3:14-17 (09/14/14)

Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, Indiana

Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness.

We're closing in on the end of Peter's writings. And shortly after writing 2 Peter, Peter himself was closing in on the end of his life. Tradition tells us that he was crucified upside down in Rome under Nero, upside down because he didn't feel worthy to be crucified like Christ. This is strictly tradition. Poor Peter would not recognize himself today in the Church of Rome! He would flat out deny his apostolic primacy or that he was the first pope. On every June 29 since 1736, a life-sized statue of Peter is crowned in Rome with a papal tiara, a ring of the fisherman, and papal vestments. According to Rome, the direct papal successor to Peter is Pope Francis! He's the patron saint of bakers and bridge builders and more, and you can call on him for aid for frenzy, foot problems, fever and more. I'm sure Peter would reject all of this.

We can identify with Peter, though, because he was so human. Luke 22:31 takes us to the upper room the night before Christ's crucifixion when Jesus looked at Peter and said, "Satan has asked to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail. And when you have turned back again, strengthen your brothers!" Of course, impetuous Peter insisted he would never deny Christ and would be willing to lay down his life for Jesus! Just a few hours later in the early morning, Peter is mingling with the soldiers, warming himself by the fire, and swearing he never knew Jesus!

But Jesus' prayer was answered. Peter did repent and returned, and God used him mightily. His faith did not fail. He devoted his life to preaching the gospel and strengthening the church. And when we come to the end of 2 Peter, it seems he is thinking of those very words of Jesus in Luke. He uses the exact same word in verse 17 – *steadfastness*, that you do not lose your own stability, your own firmness. We get our word "stereo" from this word, meaning fullness or firmness.

I've titled the messages for the next three weeks Ending Well because that's what Peter wants to do and what he wants us to do. He gives us several really practical ways to make sure we end up stable and firm for Christ and make our lives count for eternity.

Stay fired up for Christ.

Stay on mission.

Stay in God's Word.

Stay on high alert – it's a war out there!

Keep growing and changing – never stop until Jesus comes for you.

First, STAY FIRED UP FOR CHRIST – v. 14

Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,

What's Peter saying? Let's get ready for Christ to come back today! And if He does come today, how will He find you? Excited and motivated and living for Him? Or cold and backslidden and worldly? Most of us here want to be found living for Him. So how do we do it? How do we stay fired up for Christ?

First, what are you looking for? What is your life centered on? Eric touched on this last week, "What you are looking for you will be living for." What are you looking for? What are you living for? A Christian is someone who is looking for Christ. Hebrews 9:28 says Christ came once to die for sinners and He's coming back to bring final salvation to everyone looking for Him. That's the way to make your life count for eternity. Your loves are not in this world. You really expect ultimately nothing from this world. You'll probably spend very little time worrying about climate change or our declining culture and political leadership. The more you're looking for Christ, the more these earthly rulers shrink in size. Puritan Thomas Hooker preached with such vigor and authority it was like he picked up the king and put him in his pocket.

We've no hopes in this world. We're leaving it, and that may happen very shortly. Our days should be spent preparing for the next world, not being anxious about what's coming in this world. Of course we should not litter or kick animals and we should vote for limited and constitutional government and be polite to police officers and pay our bills, but our hopes are not in these things. We're looking for the coming kingdom and being personally with Christ!

If you are looking for Christ to come, you will be diligent in preparing for His return. Diligent is the main verb, an imperative meaning to spend energy preparing for something. And what does Peter tell us to diligently do? He points to three character issues here: be at peace, spotless, and blameless. These are great. First, do not spend another day full of anxiety or carrying grudges toward anyone. Romans 12:18 says as much as lies in you and as much as you are able, be at peace with all men. You don't want Christ to come back and find a nest of angry, bitter, resentful hornets in your heart! Do whatever is necessary to be reconciled with all people. Now that doesn't mean you can force other people to be reconciled to you; that's their problem. But make sure you can look into the eyes of others without any bitterness in your heart. "As much as lies in you, be at peace with all men." That's how you want Jesus to find you.

Also, be spotless and blameless. Be spotless in your moral character. Keep yourself pure. Don't have sinful salsa spotting up your necktie. No bride wants to come to meet her groom on that wedding day with a white dress full of stains and spots and grease and ketchup and what not. Ephesians 5:27 says Christ is coming to receive the church to Himself without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish!

That's what you're fired up for – to see your Lord face to face and to be prepared for His coming! Diligence means speed and haste. When guests are coming to visit your home, man, the cleaning cloths come out, the vacuums fire up, the windows finally get cleaned, the shelves have their half inch of dust wiped away, and all those shriveled lemons and hairy green stuff in your frig are thrown out. Even the toilet bowls and dust bunnies under the beds get the treatment. You respect and honor your arriving guests and want them to feel welcomed and special. And how much more should we respect and love Christ and want Him to find our lives cleaned up spiritually. Peter tells us to get busy getting ready, bring your sins to the cleansing blood of Christ, walk in the power of the Spirit, keep looking for your Lord's return! He's coming soon! Stay fired up! Meeting Christ face to face could happen to any of us at any moment. And the older we get and the reality of seeing Jesus creeping ever closer, the brighter we should be blazing for Him.

Second, STAY ON MISSION – v. 15

And regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,

There's one reason why Christ has not returned yet. As Eric taught us from v. 9, God is still saving the nations. The mission is not yet over. People all around the world need to hear the gospel. The door of the ark is still open. God has not closed off salvation and people need to hear this. We are to be on that mission every day. We need an evangelistic perspective. We may not be a Ray Comfort, although we can learn from him about giving out the gospel. But people, until Jesus comes we have a mission to accomplish, and that is to proclaim the gospel to this dying world. There are people all around us who desperately need this wonderful message.

Now, don't let the word evangelism or witnessing or sharing the gospel scare you. Just be ready every day to talk to people about Jesus in any way you can figure out. That's what Paul and Silas and his crew did in Philippi in Acts 16. They went down to the river and the Bible says simply, "They began to talk to the ladies gathered there." Just talked. Every one of us can talk, right? We have some people here who are really engaged in giving out the gospel, others are more timid. But all of are given the every-day mission of talking to others about Jesus. Have a gospel tract ready. Give people an answer, or ask people questions. Tomorrow at the store, ask the clerk what she learned in church yesterday. Be ready for a good conversation.

Stay on mission. Be fired up about seeing Christ. Every moment and every person in your life is an opportunity to at least say something! How often I beat myself up later for not at least inviting that heating and air guy who came to our house to our church. People have ended up in this church because a lady shopping for clothes engaged another gal in conversation and invited her to come. Some of you ladies have invited friends to the Genesis study. You young guys and girls have plenty of opportunities as you mingle daily with kids your age in school. I love the Bible story of that young Israelite girl up in Syria who found out her boss's husband had leprosy and she witnessed right there, "I know a man of God in Israel who can help you!" He went down to Israel and got cleansed.

Stay on mission includes staying involved in global mission work. Judi is in Lithuania. Michael and Bryce and Dan and others have gone to Lithuania, Italy, and India. Rachel and Rebekah have gone to Israel, Brooke Stollings went to South Africa this summer, and Ashley Cook is in Thailand. All have gone ultimately for the sake of the gospel! Pray for these folks. Indiana University used to be just a great basketball and sports school, but now for us it is a great place of ministry as Campus Outreach brings the gospel to those students. Praise God we can be a part of it.

Pray for God to soften the hearts of people, like He opened Lydia's heart along that river near Philippi. By the way, many of you don't need nearly all that money you've got stashed away. God loves a cheerful and bountiful giver, especially for the gospel! You're not taking it with you. But you can send it all ahead.

Stay fired up and stay on mission all the way up until you step into Jesus' presence!

Third, STAY IN GOD'S WORD – v. 16

as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Peter is a gracious man! Did you notice how he refers to Paul in verse 15? Not just "Paul, our brother," but "Paul, our *beloved* brother!" You just have to love that, especially when you remember that Paul had confronted Peter publicly in Antioch because Peter had compromised the gospel with the Jews. Not only that, but Paul had to write about it in Galatia. How easy it would have been for Peter to carry just an edge toward Paul. It takes a big man like Peter here to commend another big man.

Now, Peter refers to Paul's writings as wisdom given to him. He refers to his letters, of which there were 12, and he refers to Paul's writings as Scriptures! Basically Peter is commending us to pay attention to what Paul wrote, even though some of what he wrote isn't easy to understand. This is one of those amazing statements about your Bible that shows that the whole thing harmonizes. Liberal scholars try to set Paul against Peter and James against Paul and on and on, but it doesn't work. All 66 books harmonize into one grand story from Genesis to Revelation.

Now there are hard portions to understand, and why not? This is talking about spiritual stuff. Ephesians has some tough sections. Some aren't so tough to understand as much as they are tough to receive. I'll never forget a group of men trying to show a gentleman about the doctrine of election in Ephesians 1 and the dear guy said, "Well, I know what it says, but it doesn't mean what you think it means." And I like what Mark Twain said, "It's not what I don't understand about the Bible, but what I do understand that bothers me."

We'll see more of this next week in verse 18, but to end well you need to stay in God's Word all the way to the end of your life. Read it straight through. Don't use it like a rabbit's foot or a Chinese fortune cookie. Read it thoughtfully and prayerfully and humbly and with a heart to learn and obey! Sometimes you might want to read the same letter over and over. That's when it really gets juicy and tasty.

But never twist it to make it mean what you want it to mean. That word "distort" pictures twisting or stretching and torturing something, like on a rack, to get the victim to say what you want them to say. People too often do that with Scripture. We'll call it Scripture Torturing. People torture the Scripture to make it support modern psychology. The health and wealth people do it. Mrs. Osteen recently opened her mouth and inserted her foot and set off a firestorm when she said we don't worship God for Him, but for us and that's what makes God happy.

There are all kinds of whiz-bang interpretations, and people find the most amazing rabbits in their preaching hats to wow their followers. John Hagee is wowing people with the four blood moons. He assures us "a world-shaking event...will happen between April 2014 and October 2015." Another author, a Messianic Jewish Rabbi named Jonathan Cahn wrote *The Harbinger*. First he says God has two covenant nations, Israel and America, and that Isaiah revealed mysteries so precise they foretell American events down to the exact days. He says 9/11 was foretold in Isaiah 9:10 – I know, you all want to turn there right now. Go ahead. Tommy Ice wrote, "Many American Christians are falling for the message found in *The Harbinger* as if Isaiah himself had been resurrected and came to America and spoke it himself."

The Circle Maker is another example of making the Scripture say what you want it to say, in this case about prayer. It's based on a first century BC Jew named Honi who drew a circle, got in it, and told God he wouldn't move until God made it rain. When it started raining it was just a drizzle, so he told God to make it rain harder, and then when it poured he told God he wanted a gentle rain. You can read Tim Challies review on his blog.

These are examples of whiz-bang books and the torturing of Scriptures. Be careful. It's happening especially today with people trying to justify same sex relationships from the Bible. Any scriptural verses that regard homosexuality as immoral they call "clobber verses" and they have a way of stretching those verses to say what they want.

These examples show why it is so important to stay in the Word. Stay in the Word all the way. Gain understanding and wisdom from it. This is the only way to grow spiritually, right? It's the only way to end well.

Fourth, STAY ON HIGH ALERT – v. 17

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness.

What a picture of being swept away or carried away. Here comes a winsome and persuasive voice with some new ideas and we all jump on his bus and get carried away. Peter knew about being carried away since the very same word is used in Galatians 2:13. He was carried away by those Judaizers.

So, be on your guard, stay on the alert, it's a war out there! There are unprincipled men, lawless men, men who are not living out of strong biblical conviction. In our day they are on the internet, some of them are in mega-churches, they are in seminaries. You've got to be careful who you read, what church you attend, what you are learning at college, and what seminary you attend. I love knowing we have discerning elders and deacons and teachers here at our church. The ladies who give leadership to our women's ministry are so encouraging; they are on the alert for any unbiblical thinking coming in. It's a good church when the majority of the folks know if someone is telling the truth or just preaching.

You don't want to fall from your own stability, firmness, or steadfastness in the faith. Like Jesus told Peter, "When you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Make sure your faith is full, firm, fixed. Be

aware. Scripture rules, right? Develop those convictions. Some hills we have to die on. Genesis 2:24 marriage for me is a hill to die on. It's plain, clear.

I knew a young man who was determined to go to a liberal seminary. I met with him and talked theology with him and was wondering why he wanted to go to that seminary. Then it dawned on me. All the while I was telling him what I believed, I never could get him to tell me what he believed. The guy who just sits and listens and never commits to what he believes bothers me. The reality is there are unprincipled men in positions of authority, in teaching positions, and their hearts are not dominated and controlled by God, by the fear of God, by the authority and conviction the sufficiency of Scripture. Look out! Be aware!

How to end well? Don't get tired of the fight! Stay fired up looking for Christ's return. Stay on mission. God leaves us here to every day be an ambassadors for Him to the lost people in our world. Stay in God's Word and stay on high alert!