

Hold On To Hope (2 Peter 3:1-18)

Introduction:-

In life we often hear people remark that "nothing has really changed" with regard to situations, events, and even peoples' character, work, and defining habits! In our passage today, this same remark becomes the defining feature of the false teachers with regard to God's actions in history, and their view about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Let us now address this theme and its development in this final chapter.

1. First we begin with the Fallacy of a Flawed Argument (verses 1-7)

*After introducing the words of the prophets and apostles, with the view of leading to "wholesome thinking" (verses 1-2), in verse 3, Peter begins with the expression "Above All" or "First of All", in calling attention to a matter of great importance. And what is this matter of great importance? The answer is then given that in the "last days" (introduced by Christ's first coming), "scoffers" will come, identical with the "false teachers" described in chapter two (e.g. "following their own evil desires"), who will question the validity of **Jesus' Second Coming** on the basis of a perceived non-fulfilment of this promise. The reference to the death of "our fathers" in verse 4 may simply draw attention to the point that from Old Testament times, beginning with creation itself, until the present, nothing has really changed. In other words, these scoffers are saying that Christ has really changed nothing. Our world, they would say, is a closed system which has no room for the intervention of God, and any such idea would be no more than a vulgar myth. Peter's reply in verses 5-7 then points out that there is one basic flaw in their argument which has been overlooked. They have ignored the fact that God relates to his world by means of his **Word**. Peter then supplies **three biblical examples** in order to show how vital this truth is, which at the same time defends the words and authority of the apostles and prophets which the false teachers have rejected. These include God's word in bringing creation into existence by means of water (v.5; Genesis 1), followed by God's word of judgment on the world of ungodly people by means of water in the flood (v.6; Genesis 6-9). This example in particular contradicts the false teacher's perception, by showing that everything does **not** go on as it has since the beginning of creation. Who in Noah's day expected the flood, even though prior warning was announced loudly and clearly through Noah's words and actions? Finally, Peter concludes with God's judgment on the whole of creation and the ungodly by fire (v.7). **Application:-** These three biblical examples have shown that the stability of the created order does not, as the false teachers suppose, argue against the reality of God's intervention and judgment. Even the regular ordering of the seasons speaks of God's patience and goodness. Also, within the judgment of the flood itself, we read at the very centre of Noah's story, that God "remembered" Noah, and had not forgotten him as a righteous man (Genesis 8:1). And so for us as Christians, we can also trust God to "remember" us with his provision, grace, and care, especially in difficult times when we too might be tempted to think that God's seeming absence from our lives is the expected "normal."*

2. Secondly, we are confronted with One thing that should not be Forgotten (verses 8-10)

At the beginning of this middle section of the chapter (v.8), Peter quotes Psalm 90:4 in order to support the view that God does not view time as humans do. As God, He stands above time, with the result that when time is seen in the light of eternity, an age

appears no longer than one short day, and a day seems no shorter than a long age. Since time is purely relative with God, he waits patiently while human beings stew with impatience. And so, God's seeming delay in bringing about the consummation of all things is a result, not of indifference, but of patience in waiting for all who will come to repentance. Thus the scoffers are wrong on two points, first in failing to recognize that all things have not continued without divine intervention since creation (as with the flood), and secondly, in misunderstanding the reason for apparent divine delay in terms of God being a patient and long-suffering God (cf. Exodus 34:6-7). Further, the Day of the Lord will come like a thief (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2), suddenly, and unexpectedly. The Heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire (possibly referring to the Heavenly bodies), and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare (or "burned up"). This can mean that either the earth and its contents will disappear and not be seen anymore, or the earth and all man's works will appear before God's judgment seat (cf. Isaiah 34:4; 65:17; 66:12-16, 22-24; Mark 13:31; Romans 8:18-25; Revelation 21-22). In this way the Bible starts and finishes with a God who creates a universe, and then creates a new universe; who makes us in his image, and then remakes us in his image (2 Cor 5:17).

3. Thirdly, since all these things will happen, what Kind of People should we be? (verses 11-18)

In this final passage, the prospect of a New Heavens and Earth, should lead to a very particular kind of Christian behaviour and character, as the only appropriate preparation for such a cosmic event. And so, how do we "speed the coming of this day?" (v.12a). This phrase alone should tell us that this is not the "Big Crunch" that impersonally and inevitably ends space and time. Rather, this is the personal intervention of God the Creator and Saviour, who first of all calls us to live "holy" and "godly" lives (v.11), which are both plural in form, meaning "holy forms of behaviour and godly deeds", implying that there are many ways in which these may be practiced. This is then followed up in verse 14 by the charge to "make every effort" to be found "spotless" and "blameless" (words applied to Jesus Christ at 1 Peter 1:19), and to be found at "peace" with him, made only possible through the blood of the Cross (Colossians 1:19-20; Romans 5:1). These qualities the false teachers cannot emulate, as they have already been described by Peter as "blots" and "blemishes" (2:13) as the negative counterparts to "spotless" and "blameless." As such, they will have no place in the new "home of righteousness", which is the final destination of Christians (v.13). And if in the meantime, the Lord's patience can only mean "salvation" (v.15), supported by Paul's writings (e.g. Romans); then not only will this counter the false teacher's position about the Second Coming of Christ, but it will enable Peter's readers to "make sure of their salvation" by "growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (v.18), thus receiving a "rich" welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:3-11). It will also mean that "evangelism" will become a top priority for the church, as the only sign signalling the end of the world made by Jesus was the missionary sign of the gospel being preached to all the nations at Matthew 24:14 (cf. 2 Cor 5:17-21).

Conclusion:-

As we look forward to a New Heavens and New Earth, where our new home is called the "home of righteousness", what might the Lord's "patience" in achieving this final goal mean for us today? How might we hold on to Hope and speed the coming of this Day? Amen.