

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 21 March 2021. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“Be Diligent!”

2 Peter 3:14-16

In the New Testament, we are told of about five different types of crowns that God will one day give to Christians, in reward for specific acts of service that they did for Him here on earth. One of these crowns is the Crown of Righteousness. In **2 Timothy 4:8**, the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy that when the Lord returns, He will present the Crown of Righteousness to all those who **“love his appearing.”** Think of that! Christ will have a special reward for Christians who are looking, longing, and waiting for the day when He will appear in the clouds, and catch us up to Heaven.

Now, there are several Christians I know who, I am certain, will receive this reward. One of these Christians is my dad. For as long as I can remember, I heard my dad talking about the Second Coming of Christ. Though he is now blind in one eye, and almost blind in the other, he still gets out his magnifying glass every day: and, after reading the Scriptures that are in his daily Bible-reading schedule, he then reads a few chapters from **Revelation**. In **Revelation 1:3**, the Lord promised a special blessing to those who read and hear the words of the book of **Revelation**; and my dad takes that promise seriously. When my dad witnesses to lost people, he constantly stresses that they need to repent and be saved, because Christ could return at any moment; and he often hands out tracts that focus on the subject of the Rapture. In our family devotion times when I was growing up, our family often read the book of **Revelation**, and **2 Thessalonians**, and **Daniel**, and other books and passages that talk about the Rapture and the Second Coming. Whenever it came time for my family to sing a special song at church, my dad always wanted to sing “Redemption Draweth Nigh.” (We probably would have sung it every time if the music director had let us do so!) I can still hear my dad enthusiastically belting out the high tenor notes at the end of the song: *“Lift up your head! Lift up your head! Your redemption draweth nigh!”*

Now, my dad certainly wasn’t the only one in my life who was excited about Christ’s return! During my growing-up years, there was a general excitement about the Rapture among God’s people. I still distinctly remember that sense of excitement. However, as the years wore on, that excitement, for many Christians, wore off. Why? Perhaps it was because the Cold War had ended, and the threat of nuclear war didn’t seem as “front and centre” as it once had seemed: and thus, the “Gog and Magog” prophecies, and the Day of the LORD prophecies, didn’t seem as imminent as they once had seemed. Perhaps the prophetic implications of the rebirth of Israel in 1948 didn’t seem all that exciting anymore, since, after all, decades had passed, and Christ still hadn’t come back. Perhaps the pursuit of wealth and material things had dampened many Christians’ zeal for Christ’s coming. (I believe that this was the biggest reason of all.) Perhaps it was a combination of all these reasons. But whatever the reason, many Christians, somewhere along the line, stopped thinking on Christ’s return as they once had done.

Now, in the last year or so, as our world has been going completely insane, and as the gates of hell have seemed to be opening, many Christians in the West have been waking up, and recognising the “signs of the times.” How can we *not* sense that the spirit of Antichrist is in the world? How can we *not* recognise that a one-world totalitarian government, one-world communist-fascist economy, and one-world apostate religion are forming before our very eyes? Once again, many Christians are arousing from slumber, and talking about Christ’s return. Yet, why weren’t God’s people watching and waiting for the Lord all

along? Perhaps the reason is that many Christians looked at the Rapture as a *thrilling and fascinating study*, but never really allowed it to penetrate their *hearts*, to the point of affecting their *daily living*.

The Coming of Jesus Christ is not merely “an exciting doctrine.” It is something that should compel Christians to live *godly lives*. The question is not “How *soon* does Christ’s coming *seem* to be, based on what we see going on around us?” The question is, “Am I continually waiting for Christ’ return, and living my life for Him, as though I could see Him *today*?”

Christ has *promised* to return some day; and we are commanded to live our lives as though He could come at any moment—regardless of what is going on in the news. When we live with the expectation that Christ is coming, it compels us to live lives that please Him, because we know that we will soon give account to Him. That is what I we will be focusing on today. The title of this message is ***Be Diligent!***

2 Peter 3:14-16

I. Looking for Christ’s return leads Christians to diligence (vv. 14-15).

In **verse 14**, Peter says that *since* we are looking for these things (the Rapture, the Second Coming, the 1,000-year Kingdom, and the new heavens and new earth), we *therefore* should be “***diligent***” to live our lives in a certain way. To be “***diligent***” means “to be earnest.” It means “to work *hard*” at something. It also means “to *study* something hard.” It means to do something to the utmost of your ability, and with *passion*.

Christian, if God be who He claims to be—the immortal, invisible, all-knowing, all-powerful, holy God—then how could He *not* deserve our utmost devotion, and our most diligent service? He is God! He is our Creator! He is our King! And He is our Saviour! God deserves *passionate, zealous* service from His servants.

By the way, “zeal” and “zealous” are words that we don’t use much anymore; but we *should* use them, because they are biblical words. To be “zealous” means to be filled with warmth and passion about something. When Jesus cleansed the Temple, He was filled with burning zeal for His Father’s house; and as His followers, we should have the same kind of passionate zeal for the things of God. God despises a limp, lukewarm, passionless, wimpy, non-committal, fair-weather, take-it-or-leave-it, “I’ll try, as long as you don’t ask too much of me” kind of service. That kind of service literally makes Him sick! Remember what Christ said to the lukewarm church of Laodicea? He warned them to “***be zealous therefore, and repent.***”

Revelation 3:14-19

In everything we do, we should do it *in the power* of God, and *for* God. Christ is coming back; and we will give account to Him at the Judgment Seat *immediately* after He returns. Of course, the purpose of the Judgment Seat will not be to determine whether we will enter heaven or not. That was already settled on the day we were saved: and it was based upon the shed blood of Jesus. Heaven is a settled thing for believers. However, the Judgment Seat *will* determine the measure of reward that we will receive. We also will have to give an account for everything we did, said, and thought in our hearts. *Everything* you did on earth, whether good or bad, will be openly revealed!

Luke 12:1-3

Several years ago, a team from RTE visited one of our sister churches here in Ireland, and filmed portions of their services. A few weeks later, their church was featured in a program called “i Witness”; and the footage of their services went all over Ireland in a brief, one-minute broadcast. Now, what I found interesting (and humorous) was what their pastor told me about their fellowship time after the service that morning. Everyone was standing around, talking, laughing, drinking tea, and having a good time; but then, the “i Witness” people came into the room, and began to roll their cameras. Instantly, the room went quiet! Why? Because they knew they were being filmed! Everyone was thinking, “This is going to be seen all over Ireland! I don’t want to be seen or heard doing something dumb!” Well, guess what, Christian? The biggest “i Witness” camera in history is rolling right now; and it is recording every single thing that you are saying, doing, and even *thinking*. It will all be played back at the Judgment Seat of Christ, for all the angels of heaven, and for every believer in history, to see! Does this realisation not motivate you to be “diligent”?

Now, what are Christians to be diligent *to do*? Peter mentions three things. First, Christians should be diligent to “***be found of him in peace.***” We should be found “***in peace***” with the Lord, and “***in peace***” with others.

Now, to someone who doesn’t know Christ, this may seem like an impossible demand. How can the Lord command people to be “***in peace,***” when there are so many things that can make our lives *not* so peaceful? Well, I am here to testify that this is *not* an impossible command to obey--*if* you have truly placed your faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour. In order to have real peace in your heart, you must first be saved!

The Apostle Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:14** that Christ “***is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us.***” Why is Jesus our Peace? Because by dying on the cross for us, He has “***slain***” (or destroyed) the enmity between us and God (**Ephesians 2:16**). By paying for our sins, He has broken down the wall that separated us from God: and that wall was the Law. God’s Law declares us all to be guilty, and bars us from a relationship with God. However, by paying the price for our sins in our place, Jesus *cancelled* the penalty of the Law, and made it possible for us to be reconciled to God—*if* we will simply receive His offer. The moment you acknowledge that Jesus paid it all for you, and humbly receive His gift of salvation, God declares you to be “at peace” with Him. He declares you to be no longer His enemy. Instead, you are made His son or daughter. If you have *not* yet repented of your sin and placed your trust in Jesus as Saviour, you need to do so! In order to have *peace* in your heart, you must first have *Christ* in your heart.

Romans 5:1 says, “***Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.***” “Justified” means “declared to be righteous.” The judicial, legal position of every Christian is that he is “righteous”; and thus, he is reconciled to God. If you’re truly saved by faith, then God says that you “***have***” peace with God. That is your position with Him. You are no longer on Satan’s side; you are on God’s side now. You are in His family. However, to *live* “***in peace***”—to have an actual sense of peace and calm in your heart every day—you must continually *submit* to the Word of God. Let’s look at some Scriptures.

Colossians 3:15-16

Psalm 119:165

Are you tired of being offended and angry about every unpleasant thing that happens to you? Are you tired of being in inner turmoil because of difficult people and circumstances around you? If so, I have good news: *you don't have to be angry, or in turmoil.* God's Word promises that you can have "**great peace.**" Maybe you're thinking, "Pastor, I understand what you're trying to say; but you don't understand what I'm going through, and what kind of people I have to deal with." In answer to that, I would say: "I don't *need* to know your circumstances, because I know who can give you peace in your heart *in spite of* your circumstances." I know the one who can empower you to give a soft answer to those who are angry at you. I know who can empower you to be "**in peace,**" even in the presence of your worst enemies. His name is the Prince of Peace--the Lord Jesus Christ.

Years ago, a Western pastor asked a group of house-church pastors in China how the Christians in China respond to their persecutors. This was their answer:

"The security police regularly harass a believer who owns the property where a house-church meets. The police say, '*You have got to stop these meetings! If you do not stop these meetings, we will confiscate your house, and we will throw you out into the street.*' Then the property owner will probably respond, '**Do you want my house? Do you want my farm? Well, if you do, then you need to talk to Jesus, because I gave this property to Him.**' The security police will not know what to make of that. So they will say, '*We don't have any way to get to Jesus, but we can certainly get to you! When we take your property, you and your family will have nowhere to live!*' And the house-church believers will declare, '**Then we will be free to trust God for shelter, as well as for our daily bread.**' '*If you keep this up, we will beat you!*' the persecutors will tell them. '**Then we will be free to trust Jesus for healing,**' the believers will respond. '*And then we will put you in prison!*' the police will threaten. By now, the believer's response is almost predictable: '**Then we will be free to preach the good news of Jesus to the captives, to set them free. We will be free to plant churches in prison.**' '*If you try that, we will kill you!*' the frustrated authorities will vow. And, with utter consistency, the house-church believers will reply, '**Then we will be free to go to heaven and be with Jesus forever.**'"¹

Christian, as a child of God, you "**have peace**" with God. You're in His family. You're joined with Christ, and are yoked to Him. Yet, if you're not submitting to His Word, you're *fighting* with Him. You're *struggling* against Him. You're not really living "**in peace.**" He's trying to pull you in the way that He would have you to go, but you're pulling the other way. If this be the spiritual condition you're in, then you need to submit to Christ's Word, and submit to Him. Until you fully surrender your will to His, you will continue to be offended and upset with the Lord every time things aren't going the way you want them to go; and you will continue to be offended and upset with every wrong that others do to you. You will *not* have the kind of peace in your heart that you *should* have. Your relationship with the Lord affects every relationship in your life. Do you want Christ to find you "**in peace**" when He returns? Do you want to have the kind of peace that millions of our Chinese brothers and sisters have, even in the face of horrific persecution? Then submit to God's Word!

¹ Nik Ripken, *The Insanity of God* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), pp. 262-263.

Secondly, Peter says that Christians should be diligent to be found **“without spot”** when Christ returns. To be **“without spot”** means to have no unconfessed sin staining your character. Now, is Peter saying that it is possible for a Christian to attain to sinless perfection? No, that’s not what he’s saying. As long as you are in this mortal body, you will still have a sin nature, and you will get dirty. However, you also have a way to *get clean*. The Bible says, **“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”** The Bible also says, **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”** Are you being diligent to be found without spot, Christian? *Christ* is like a **“lamb without blemish and without spot”**; and He wants you to strive to be like Him.

Ephesians 5:25-27

Thirdly, Peter says that Christians should be found **“blameless.”** This means that there is no questionable thing in your life to which someone could point and say, “That Christian is a hypocrite! He says one thing, but does another.” It means that you are living your life in such a holy manner, that when people open their mouths to cast blame at you, there is nothing they can say. By the way, this is the very first requirement for a bishop in **1 Timothy 3:2**. Paul said, **“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.”** That’s a high standard! A pastor, Paul says, should be **“blameless.”** Yet, according to Peter, this is the same standard to which *every* Christian should be held. It’s not only the pastor who is expected to be blameless: *every Christian* should strive to be found **“blameless.”** Are you endeavouring to be blameless, Christian? Are you representing your Lord in such a way that your accusers are put to silence?

1 Thessalonians 5:23

On the Resurrection Day, every believer will finally be completely without sin or blame. Yet, in this verse, Paul isn’t talking about being blameless *after* the Resurrection: he’s talking about being “preserved blameless” *until* the Resurrection. *Until* the day of Christ’s appearing, God wants us to strive to be found blameless. People may accuse you of being “a crazy Christian”; but they shouldn’t be able to point at any shameful thing in your life. There should be nothing in your life which would bring disgrace to Christ’s name.

Now, there is one more thing that Christians should be doing as they are watching for Christ’s coming. Peter says that we should **“account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.”** (Read verse 15 again.) What is Peter saying, here? Well, to **“account”** means to “reckon,” to “take into account,” or to “consider.” And what should we “consider”? Peter says that as we should consider that the **“longsuffering of our Lord is salvation.”** Remember that word, **“longsuffering”**? That is the same word that Peter used when he was explaining why Christ is still prolonging His coming. Let’s look at that verse again. (Read 2 Peter 3:9 again.)

Christ is prolonging His coming because He is **“longsuffering.”** He is giving mankind as much time as possible to be saved before the day of His wrath begins. We need to remember this, brethren. If we will **“account”** that Christ is tarrying His coming because He wants people to be saved, then we will be motivated to do all in *our* power to reach people for Jesus.

By the way, look at what Peter says at the end of **verse 15**. He says, “*even as our beloved brother Paul...hath written unto you.*” Apparently, Paul had mentioned this very truth somewhere in his letters. Where did Paul say this? Well, there are *many* places where Paul mentioned God’s longsuffering toward sinners; but we’ll look at one of them.

Romans 2:1-4

God is *very* good. He is *very* longsuffering. He is not willing that any should perish. He desires that every soul would turn to Him and be saved. Yet, God doesn’t force salvation on anyone. It’s a choice that every soul must make. My question to some of you is: “Have *you* been saved?” Have you truly turned to Him in repentance and faith? If not, *why* not? If you do know Christ as Saviour, I would ask: “Are you living for Him?” Are you being diligent to be found in peace, without spot, and blameless, when He returns? Are you accounting that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation? Are you remembering that Christ wants more souls to be saved, and that He wants *you* to win them? If you will keep His coming always in view, you will be motivated to be diligent in your service to God.

II. Ignorance of God’s Word leads the lost to destruction (v. 16).

(Read verse 16 again.) Before we get into the meat of this verse, there is an important truth about the *Scriptures* that I would like to point out. Did you notice what Peter said about Paul’s epistles? He referred to them as “Scripture”! He said that those who were unlearned and unstable had “*wrested*” (in other words, “twisted,” or “perverted”) Paul’s letters--just as they did to “*other*” Scriptures. That is a very important statement! What it shows us is that Christians *already* recognised Paul’s letters as being Scripture, during Paul’s own lifetime. It didn’t take hundreds of years of fierce debate for powerful Christian bishops to decide which books they wanted to deem as “Scripture.” The canon of Scripture had already been decided by *all Christians everywhere*, while the Apostles were still living (or shortly thereafter)! For a short while after the death of the Apostle John, there were some churches that questioned the canonicity of a few of the epistles (such as Jude, and 2 Peter, and 3 John); but even these questions were soon resolved, as God’s people came to recognise these books as Scripture, as well. How did they all agree? Because they were all led by the voice of one Shepherd--the Lord Jesus Christ!

Throughout the New Testament, we find that Christians recognised the newly written letters of Peter, Paul, John, James, Jude, Matthew, Mark, and Luke as Scripture, as soon as they were written. Many times we read that the letters of Paul, Peter, and John were circulated among the churches. In **1 Thessalonians 2:13**, Paul thanked the Christians in the church of Thessalonica for recognising his preaching as the Word of God, and not merely the words of men. In **1 Timothy 5:18**, Paul quoted from the book of **Deuteronomy**; but in the very same sentence, he quoted from the Gospel of **Luke** (which had been written only about 3 years earlier), and then referred to both Deuteronomy *and* Luke as “Scripture.” Obviously, God’s people already knew and recognised that the newly-written Gospel of **Luke** was genuine, divinely-inspired Scripture, with just as much authority as the ancient book of **Deuteronomy**!

Christian, don’t ever let anyone tell you that the Roman Catholic Church “gave” us the Bible at the Council of Nicaea, or in the Council of Hippo, or in the Council of Carthage. The

Catholic Church gave us nothing! The Catholic Church did *recognise* the 66 books of the Bible in those fourth century councils; but *Christians everywhere* had already received all 66 books of the Bible by the end of the first century, after the last book of the New Testament was written! They didn't need a big council to determine it. They didn't have to have a big debate over whether the pagan Epistle of Thomas, or the Gnostic Epistle of Judas, or the heretical Epistle of Barnabas, with its false gospel of good works, were Scripture. They *knew* that these books weren't Scripture! How did they know? Here's how.

John 10:1-5, 27

Jesus said, ***“My sheep hear my voice.”*** This means that saved people know the difference between their Saviour's words, and an imposter's words! The Catholic Church didn't give us the Bible. *God* gave us the Bible; and His people have simply recognised it, and received it by faith. They were *always* able to recognise it. Why? Because God's people have the Holy Spirit living inside them; and they know the Lord's voice when they hear it!

Now, with this in mind, let's look at what Peter says about the ***“unlearned”*** and ***“unstable.”*** (**Read verse 16 again.**) Please realise that the word ***“unlearned”*** does not mean “unintelligent.” Peter is not talking about people's IQ, or their mental capacity. Peter is *not* saying that “If you are not highly educated, you can't possibly understand Scripture: so just leave it to the scholars.” No, God has given born-again Christians the ability to understand *everything* that God has revealed in His Word. **First John 2:20** says, ***“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.”***

So, then, who *are* these ***“unlearned”*** people of whom Peter is speaking? They are people who are *wilfully* unlearned. He is talking about people who are *wilfully* ignorant. He's talking about people who either ignore, or twist, the truth of Scripture. He's talking about *unsaved* people who do not want to hear the plain teaching of God's Word. Remember what Peter said earlier in the chapter about the “scoffers”? Let's remind ourselves. (**Read 2 Peter 3:5.**)

When Peter speaks of the ***“unlearned,”*** he is talking about religious, yet lost people, who don't *want* to see what God's Word really says about sin, and salvation, and righteousness, and judgment, and death, and hell, or things to come. These people wrest Scripture to make it say what they want to believe. They twist God's Word to make it appear that salvation is through good works, and that outward rituals can redeem us. They twist Scripture to make it look as though man is basically good; that sin isn't that big a deal; that there are “gods,” saints, angels, or other beings through whom we can get to God; that God isn't really going to judge us; or, that there isn't such a thing as hell. They don't *really* want to know God's Word: they want to soothe their consciences with comfortable lies. They may have a certain “knowledge” of Scripture; but they don't know its true meaning, nor its power. They may be *intellectually* “learned”; but spiritually, they are ignorant and “unlearned.”

Now, as we close this morning, please notice what else Peter says about these people. He also describes them as “unstable.” In other words, their lives are teetering back and forth, and are ready to collapse. Why? Because they have not built their lives upon the Rock of Jesus Christ. They are building their lives on the sinking sand of their own efforts, their own knowledge, and their own wisdom. They *choose not to hear God's Word*, and choose instead to “redeem” themselves in their own way. Tragically, they are heading toward destruction—

not only in *this* life, but in *eternity*. **Proverbs 14:12** says, “***There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.***”

Conclusion: Have *you* listened to Christ’s Word? Have you come to Him for salvation? If not, God does not desire for you to perish: He wants you to repent. If you have never been saved, I urge you to come to Christ today! If you *do* know Christ as your Saviour, I would ask: Are you being diligent? Our redemption truly is drawing near, folks. Christ is coming! When He comes, will He find you living in peaceful fellowship with Himself, and at peace with others? Will He find you living a spotless, blameless life? Will He find you living your life with the realisation that the longsuffering of God is salvation?