

Title: It Won't Be Long Now
Text: 2 Peter 3:14-18
Theme: Faithful endurance
Series: 2 Peter (conclusion)
Prop Stmtnt: The Christian life is a long-walk of gospel-driven obedience in a Christ-like direction.

Read Text:

One of my favorite movies is The Pursuit of Happiness with Will Smith. The essence of the movie is a dad who will do anything he can in order to keep a promise he made to his kid. Even though I know it turns out well, it is still hard for me to watch it because I feel the sense of panic that the dad feels when he's afraid that he is letting down his kid. It doesn't matter how big the mountain, how deep the valley or how wide the river, if I made a promise to one of my kids, I did everything in my power to keep that promise. I knew that I could not make their world perfect. That was not my job. But I could make promises and keep them. I knew that if they knew that they could trust me, no matter what, that it would provide a foundation of confidence and a setting of security that would not only serve them well, but ultimately, I wanted them to know that our God makes promises and keeps them perfectly.

Our text is the conclusion of 2 Peter. It is a summary and a summons. It is a recap and a reminder. It is challenge and a charge. It is a mindset and a mission. It begins with the word, "therefore" that takes us back to the promise that God made that he is going to make for us a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. This promise changes everything.

Timmy Price is finishing a tough round of chemo. Ray Dishman is facing one. Lou Crighton has to be on oxygen and Nathan Eda is trying to get off of it. For every life that seems young and every life that seems old and every one in between, what does this promise mean? Now, wait. Before you answer that, consider this. Timmy, Ray, Lou and Nathan love Jesus. But Timmy, Ray, Lou and Nathan are not the only ones to face adversity. Everybody does. You face adversity and you live with it everyday. There are two kinds of people: 1) Those who live as if this world is all that there is, and 2) Those who live, realizing that it isn't. If you live as if this world is all that there is, how do you deal with a major adversity versus those who realize that this life is not all that there is? The promise of a new heavens and a new earth (new creation) when, (as Paul writes in 1 Cor. 15.28), "*all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all*" makes you realize that there is a perfect world, a greater world, and an eternal world to come. If you are convinced that Christ will return, and his kingdom will come, then you will: 1) Make certain that you are a believer. 2) Consider the patience of God as an opportunity for salvation. 3) Stay on Guard. 4) Keep growing in Christ. 5) Embrace the glory of God in all things. Let's embrace the challenge. The Christian life is a long-walk of gospel-driven obedience in a Christ-like direction.

1. **Make certain that you are a believer.** (14)

As a kid my mom would give me a list of chores to get done while she was gone. Instead of doing them right away, I would typically mess around and get distracted doing everything else other than what I should be doing. Then, I would either see her car pulling into the driveway or hear the garage door going up and I would try in 30 seconds to get 30 minutes' worth of work done, which of course never worked. The return of Christ is going to be like a thief. It will be sudden. If you are found by him in sin (if this is what your life is regularly like), you may not be a believer. Genuine believers are concerned about their own godliness (morality and purity) but, they are concerned about their godliness because they love Christ. Loving Christ characterizes the life of a believer. A genuine believer is at peace with God because he is reconciled to God through Christ. Loving Christ means that I long for Christ and will guard my heart so that I am ready for his return. Does the idea of spots and blemishes cause you to shrug your shoulders or does it cause concern and attention? If you are comfortable with your sin, you need to be uncomfortable claiming to be a believer.

If you are convinced that Christ will return, then you will look at things differently. Take for example, the pandemic. In the early days of this, there was widespread fear and predictions of apocalyptic proportions. A lot of people have died, and it is still a reality but our nation has not responded with a greater fear of and respect for God, at all. If anything, there is an even greater emphasis on living for yourself in the moment. It's almost like this "brush with the end" has given people motivation to throw everything at the here and now because you never know that you could die. But for us, we recognize that we do not have a sense of panic because we don't get to do things on our bucket list. Why worry about a bucket when you are going to inherit a water park? Peter loves his readers. He calls them "beloved" 4x in this chapter. He cares that they are truly in Christ and that they are prepared for the return of Christ.

Peter spent upwards of three years with Christ. He knows, in that sense, what he is missing by not being in the presence of Christ and he knows what his readers are in store for when they will be with Christ and he can't wait for them to experience it. He writes how he lives. Even though Peter is anticipating his own death (1.14), he has no concern whatsoever about the "delay" in Christ's return. If Christ has not returned as quickly as you think, it is with very good reason. Therefore,

2. Consider the patience of God as an opportunity for salvation. (15-16)

The return of Christ is a blessing and a judgment. It is a blessing to those who are ready, but it is a judgment to those who live as if Christ is not going to return. To those who are in the midst of a long night of the soul, the return of Christ is instant glory, instant relief, and instant joy. But, it is also instant judgment.

Many of you have had the experience of taking a timed-test. GRE, the bar, CPA, Nursing test, are all examples of massive tests that take months and years of prep, and you feel as if the stakes are really high. Pass and there is relief and celebration. Fail and there is frustration,

embarrassment, discouragement and more dreaded work. There comes the moment when the timer goes off and you cannot go back and change your answers or fill in any more blanks. It is done. Beloved, right now, the Lord has given you opportunity to address things in your life. The patience of God is the opportunity for you to be certain of your salvation, and to be prepared for the return of Christ. At the same time, the patience of God provides not only opportunity for you to make things right, but it gives others the opportunity to come to faith in Christ.

We are in the gap between promise and fulfillment. Every promise of God does not have immediate fulfillment. Every warning of God does not have immediate consequences either. So, how do you live in the gap? How we live in the gap reveals whether or not we really believe God. How we live in the gap therefore, reveals whether or not our faith is genuine. That is his point.

Now here in the middle of verse 15 and verse 16, Peter defends Paul and Paul's writings. There were some influencers who were deliberately taking things that Paul had written and were either twisting them or taking them out of context, like they did other scriptures, and were trying to promote immorality. These heretics were trying to say that Paul was in their camp and Peter is saying, Oh no! Paul is one of us, definitely not them! There are a few things to note: 1) Peter refers to Paul as our beloved brother Paul. There is a mutual ownership, relationship and treasuring of Paul. It is so common to see leaders threatened by one another and talking ill of one another that when we witness this kind of affection and trust without any sense of threat, it is beautiful. Paul confronted Peter years before about a matter in which Peter was not being consistent and clearly, Peter took this to heart and loved Paul for it. Secondly, Peter commends Paul's writings. The letters that Paul wrote "to you" could be Ephesians and Colossians, though we can't be certain. Peter does seem to be aware of "all his letters" (v.16) as being so useful for the early church. Along with that, Peter refers to Paul's writings as Scripture. The writings of Paul are, in Peter's mind, on the same level as the OT scriptures. Peter humbly acknowledges that there are some things that Paul writes about that are not easy to grasp. Is he referring to Romans 9? Maybe. Verse 15 sounds as if Paul is in the past tense, that is, he has already died, which is likely the case. Paul probably died at the hands of Nero and Peter is not far behind. But what is Peter warning about? Well, was Paul misunderstood, even deliberately before? Yes. If so, how and would that have any connection here?

I have stated before that I believe that the book of Romans is the body of theology that Paul taught wherever he went. In that book he lays out the gospel that is described as the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. He also defends this doctrine against those who either try to use it as an excuse for immorality and against those who accuse it of leading to that. In other words, if you tell people that they can be forgiven of their sin by Christ and they do not have to earn it or pay for it, then this will encourage people to go out and sin because it is all forgiven. That is not the right understanding of the gospel. But, there are people who have taught that and who have certainly lived that way. I pray that you are not any of them. This notion is often wrongfully applied by those who want to indulge in immorality. "It's okay, we can always get forgiveness." It is not a big step to go from that to, "It's okay, we are forgiven." And it is not a big step to go from that to, "It's okay, it doesn't matter."

When people twist God's Word or ignore it to the point where people who once claimed to be believers or who looked like believers are now going sideways, it is discouraging, demoralizing, and flat out grievous. In those moments, we are tempted to say, "what is the use?" Why I am staying on course? Peter knows our vulnerability. In verse 17 he challenges us to stay on guard and verse 18 challenges us to keep growing. These final two verses and these next two points summarize the book of 2 Peter which we should constantly carry in a pocket in our heart.

3. Stay on guard. (17)

Obviously, we live east of Eden. We live now in the gap between promise and fulfillment. We live in a world that is not a friend to grace and is not supportive of the gospel. We live in a world that is hostile to its own Creator, and in a land that is at war with the Kingdom of Christ. We are pilgrims and foreigners and as such we live on guard. We know that the values and goals of our world are not our own and we have to guard our hearts that we do not give ourselves to them. But, that is not the focus of Peter's warning here in verse 17. He is talking about our need to stay on guard within the church. Not everyone who claims to be a believer is a believer, so stay sharp. It's like this.

Let's say that you are single and you decide to play Russian roulette with an on-line dating service. But you don't use tinder, since everyone knows what that is for. Oh no, you use a Christian dating service, because everyone on that is a genuine, committed follower of Christ, who understands the gospel and is a faithful member of a healthy local church, right? Of course not! In fact, several of you have told me that finding someone like that on one of these sites is like finding a needle in a haystack. You know that there are people who try to use Christianity as a means to gain influence in other people's lives. If a person claims to be a believer, we are inclined to let our guard down. But what Peter is saying is, don't leave your discernment in the parking lot. Bring it with you. Learn to be a good theologian. Learn to read and understand the Bible so that no one can twist it without you knowing it.

This is one of the reasons why expositional preaching is so essential for a healthy church and for healthy spiritual lives. Expositional preaching is preaching where the main point of the text is the main point of the sermon. I am really trying to do two related things in every sermon. I am telling you what the text says, but I am doing it in a way that helps you see where I got this. That is why I want you to have a Bible, read your Bible, bring your Bible and look at your Bible. If you do that, I, nor anyone else, will never be able to pull a fast one on you. If I start going soft and attempt to get you to embrace things that are cultural instead of theological, then you will look at the text and the Spirit of God will cause your baloney detector to go off. Stay on guard by staying in God's Word. Lawless people are those who reject God's law and will cause others to lose their stability. Lawless people are people who have fallen into a state of apostasy and will cause others to fall if they are not careful. Don't let them "carry you away." We must be people of the Word. Our worship services are rather simple. We pray the Word, read the Word, sing the Word, talk about the ministry of the Word, pray about that, sing the Word some more,

preach the Word, respond to the Word and then we rub the Word off onto one another and reverberate the Word in a thousand ways in conversation, prayer, and ministry to one another and to our world. The Word keeps us on guard. But, the Word does so much more. The Word helps us to...

4. **Keep growing in Christ.** (18a)

The heart of following Jesus is a relationship with Jesus. It is through Jesus that we have a relationship with our Triune God. The basis of our relationship with Jesus is the grace of God. Grace means to be given something that you do not deserve. It is the grace of God that causes you to be aware of your own sin and your own need for forgiveness. "'Tis grace that taught my heart to fear," we sing. It is the kindness of God that makes me realize that I have a problem that I cannot solve. But there is more. Jesus did for me what I could not do. Jesus lived a perfect life in my place and then he died on the cross as the perfectly sufficient payment for my sin that paid for all of my sin and absorbed all of the just and righteous wrath of God. There is nothing left for me to pay. There is nothing left for me to do. Genuine Christianity is not based on what you do or what you have done, but it is based entirely upon what Jesus has accomplished.

A. Jesus is our source of grace

Jesus gave us forgiveness, righteousness, he adopted us, sealed us and indwelt us by the Spirit, baptized us into the body, redeemed us and is keeping us. All of this is by his grace. I receive this by personally believing it to be true for me and trusting Jesus as my Savior. When we do this, we give to Christ the keys to our life to take over. What does it mean for Jesus to drive our bus? It means that we relate to him based on what he has done for us. He loves us. He sacrificed for us. He called us. He owns us. He keeps us. He names us. He knows us. We are his. So, growing in the grace of our Lord (King) and Savior (crucified one and resurrected one) means that we keep reminding ourselves of all that Christ has done, and we keep enjoying that, keep thanking Jesus, keep believing that, keep trusting that and order our lives by that. I want my life to reflect God's grace, not only in purity, but also in love. The grace of God motivated Jesus to die for me, so growing in grace means that I am going to grow in my love and appreciation of what Christ has done. But it also means that I am going to grow in graciousness. If I am growing in the grace of Jesus I am going to be growing in my depth of love for others and my grace to them. My heart will widen and will have a greater capacity for kindness, patience, forgiveness, tenderness and mercy. Grow in grace and keep growing.

B. Jesus is the goal of our knowledge

You cannot exhaust your knowledge of Jesus. There is always more to see of him, more to know, more to embrace and more to follow. Our knowledge of Christ and his relationship with the Father and the Spirit and his relationship with us fuels our growth in grace. Growing in our actual knowledge of Jesus helps our growth in grace to be substantive and not sentimental.

Growing in our knowledge of Jesus gives depth and conviction to our affections. In fact, knowledge is more than information, it means experience. Grow in knowledge and keep growing.

I saw a new model unveiled by a car company the other day on-line. I knew that one of our members worked for that company and I told him that I thought that was a great vehicle. So, he went and borrowed that vehicle and gave me a ride in it. I knew about the vehicle on-line, but I experienced the vehicle when I rode in it, looked in the engine, examined the features and played with the electronics. This is what the word knowledge means here in this verse. Grow in your understanding of Jesus by growing in your life with him. Now, do you see the relationship of verse 18 with verse 17? When you grow in the grace of Jesus, you will be on guard against those who try to make you think that God's love for you is based on your merits. And when you grow in grace and knowledge you will be on guard against those who try to say that purity and holiness are not essential fruits of the gospel. Grace taught our hearts to fear and grace our fears believed. Grace has brought us safe thus far and grace will lead us home. This letter begins with the grace of Jesus and it concludes with it. This letter also begins with an expression of praise and adoration to Christ, identifying him as God, and now this closing doxology does the same.

5. **Soli Deo Gloria forever!** (18b)

There are several doxologies in the Bible that are directed to God the Father. This one is directed to God, the Son – Jesus. Jesus began a good work in us and Jesus will complete that good work in us. That was the theme of VBS this week and it was a good one. Jesus finishes what he starts and the finish is a joy that will never end. That day gives meaning and motivation to this day. That day is certain, so this day has hope. That day is forever, so this day is temporary. That day is perfect, so I can endure this day. No matter how long this trial is, it cannot compare to this day.

I do not know how much my mom can hear me or understand when I speak. But I constantly say to her, "It won't be long now." She is going to Jesus or Jesus is coming back. Either way works. That is true for her and, in fact, that is true for every single one of us who have trust Christ. It won't be long now. Therefore, how you live now, matters forever. Live for Christ. Trust him. Follow him. Pray for others to do the same. Be ready for him. Look for him. Long for him. He is worth it and he is coming back. It won't be long now.