



BACK TO THE BIBLE SERIES: 2 Peter: Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

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Message Title: It's Time to Repent Pt. 1

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R.C. Sproul, in his classic *The Holiness of God*, illustrates clearly our tendency to presume upon grace. Here is what he says:

Our tendency is to take grace for granted, and it was driven home to me while teaching college students. I had the assignment of teaching a freshmen Old Testament course to 250 students at a Christian college. On the first day of class I went over the course assignments carefully. My experience taught me that the assignment of term papers required a special degree of explanation. This course required three short term papers. I explained to the students that the first paper was due on my desk by noon, the last day of September. No extensions were to be given except for students who were physically confined to the infirmary, or those who had a death in the immediate family. If the paper was not turned in on time the student would receive an F for the assignment. The students acknowledged that they understood the requirements.

On the last day of September, 225 students dutifully handed in their term papers. Twenty-five students stood quaking in terror, full of remorse. They cried, "Oh, Professor Sproul, we are so sorry! We didn't budget our time properly; we didn't make the proper adjustment from high school to college. Please don't give us an F! Please, oh please give us an extension."

I bowed to their pleas for mercy. "Alright," I said. "I'll give you a break this time. But, remember, the next assignment is due the last day of October."

The students were profuse in their gratitude and filled the air with solemn promises of being on time for the next assignment. Then came the last day of October. Two hundred students came with their papers. Fifty students came empty-handed. They were nervous but not in a panic. When I asked for their papers, again they were contrite. "Oh, Professor, it was Homecoming Week. Besides it is midterm, and all our other assignments are due. Please give us one more chance. We promise it will never happen again."

Once more I relented. I said, "Okay, but this is the last time. If you are late for the next paper, it will be an F. No excuses, no whining, just an F. Is that clear?"

"Oh yes, Professor, you are terrific." Spontaneously the class began to sing, "We love you, Prof Sproul, oh yes we do!" I was Mr. Popularity.

Can you guess what happened on the last day of November? Right. One hundred fifty students came with their term papers. The other hundred strolled into the lecture hall, utterly unconcerned. "Where are your term papers?" I asked.

One student replied, “Oh, don’t worry about it, Prof, we’re working on them. We’ll have them for you in a couple of days, no sweat.” I picked up my lethal black grade book and began taking down names. “Johnson! Do you have your paper?” “No, Sir,” came the reply. “F,” I said as I wrote in the book. “Muldaney! Do you have your paper?” Again, “No, Sir,” was the reply.” I marked another F in the book.

The students reacted with unmitigated fury! They howled in protest, screaming, “That’s not fair!” I looked at one of the howling students. “Lavery! You think it’s not fair?” “Yes,” he growled in response.

“I see. So, it’s justice you want? I seem to recall that you were late with your paper the last time. If you insist upon justice, you will certainly get it. I’ll not only give you an F for this assignment, but I’ll change your last grade to the F you so richly deserved.”

The student was stunned. He had no more arguments to make. He apologized for being so hasty and was suddenly willing to settle for one F instead of two.

The students had quickly taken my mercy for granted. They assumed it. When justice suddenly fell, they were unprepared for it. It came as a shock, and they were outraged. This, after only two doses of mercy in the space of two months.

Just because God hasn’t whacked you, just because God hasn’t rained down fire and brimstone upon you because of your sin, don’t misunderstand that. Don’t interpret that as God being indifferent or apathetic about your sin. To make that mistake would be disastrous. That’s what we want to talk about. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 2 Peter, Chapter 3. You remember, Peter told us in Chapter One that he believes his death is imminent. These are the final words of Peter. He dearly loves these people, and this is his last appeal—that they walk uprightly before God. Chapter 3, Verse 1:

This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles. (*NASB, 2 Peter 3:1-2)

Notice the word beloved. He has used it before in the letter; he uses it four times in the final chapter. If you have an NIV, I think it says something like dear friends. That is much too mild; it is actually a much stronger term. Peter genuinely loves these people. He is very concerned about the false teachers. He’s about to die and this is his last appeal—that they listen and walk uprightly.

When he says I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, he said almost the identical thing in Chapter 1. To stir up means to stir awake, to wake up, to keep awake. Sincere carries the idea that if you honestly want to be a Christ-follower, if you want to travel the path of life, if you’re serious about your Christian life, then you need to stay awake. The false teachers are out there, and they’re very good at what they do. He reminds them to consider their source of truth, and again he roots it back to the prophets and the apostles. We would say today that truth comes from the inspired, authoritative, reliable Word of God. Anything other than that is merely someone’s opinion. So, again, kind of a reminder of what he has already said. Verse 3:

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts,

Sometimes you hear people today say, “You know, I think we might be in the last days,” to which I always say, “Well, we are in the last days. They started with the ascension of Jesus and they will continue until the return of Christ. We’ve been in the last days for about two thousand years.” The idea is that in these last days the mockers will mock. It’s kind of an interesting way to say it, but in essence he’s saying that’s who they are; that’s their nature, and so they are going to be true to their nature, and the mockers will mock.

Basically it’s the reminder that if you are going to travel the path of life, if you are going to be a serious Christ-follower, you need to come to grips with the fact there are going to be people that are going to laugh at you. They are going to mock you; they are going to make fun of you; they are going to attack you. They are going to accuse you of being somehow intellectually challenged— you’re just kind of dumb and naïve. If you think that by being a serious Christ-follower everyone around you is going to love you and respect you, you are sadly mistaken. At some point you have to come to grips with the fact that the mockers will mock.

I think we all understand this in an age of so-called tolerance. It’s always sobering how incredibly intolerant our culture is toward those who follow Christ. And I would not imagine that getting better in the near future. If you’re going to be serious about following Jesus, you better understand the mockers will mock. Why do they mock? The text tells us, because they follow after their own lusts. Peter has taught us this. They want to indulge the flesh. They want to be their own god; they want to live their lives their own way. They want to create their own moral standard; they want to pursue whatever makes them happy. “If it feels good, do it,” and they despise authority. They are offended that anyone would possibly suggest that there is an absolute moral standard and that they somehow will be held accountable one day for their behavior. They so hate that message that they mock, and they laugh, and they make fun. That is the way it’s going to be, and we need to understand that.

What are the false teachers, the mockers, specifically mocking that Peter is addressing? Well he tells us:

...saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” (Vs. 4)

What the mockers are mocking specifically, in this case, is the concept of the return of Christ. This has come up in 1 Peter; it comes up in 2 Peter—this idea that Jesus is actually coming back, and that He’s going to hold people accountable. The mockers think that is funny. They laugh and mock at that. It has been thirty, maybe forty years since the ascension of Christ. No sign of Jesus, and so they mock and make fun.

Now this should make sense. If you are going to function as your own god, if you're going to indulge the flesh, if you are going to live your life your way on your terms, you have to convince yourself, at the end of the story, there will be no accountability; there will be no judgment. And so, you can see how this all works together. I want to indulge my flesh; I want to live my life my way, so I laugh at the idea of an ultimate judgment. Certainly, that cannot be true ...and their rationale for that is that ever since the beginning, generation after generation after generation live; they die...they live; they die...and as far as I can see, no intervention from God. "I don't see God showing up and judging anyone. I don't see God whacking anyone from Heaven." So, if that's true, why not eat, drink and be merry? That's the logic of the false teachers. To which Peter responds, Verse 5:

For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water,

Now it's helpful to know when it says it escapes their notice, the Greek implies they intentionally choose not to see. At the end of the day, people see what they want to see, and the mockers are intentionally choosing to see the world a particular way. People formulate a worldview; it becomes the lens through which they view the world, and they see what they want to see. And so, the mockers are saying, "As far as I can see, I don't see any times where God intervened and whacked somebody." So, the idea that Jesus would come back and do that is laughable, to which Peter responds, "Hey, they see what they want to see." "But last time I checked," Peter says, "seems to me God intervened in a pretty significant way when He created the universe." Peter's language almost exactly copies the language of Genesis Chapter One—this idea that God created, this idea of why there is something rather than nothing. Did the universe self-create, which is of course a nonsensical statement, for if you don't exist, you can't create yourself. So how did all this start? Where did it come from? Wouldn't that have to be the great intervention of God into human history?

You know, sometimes I hear people say, "You know, if God is real, why doesn't He just show Himself? Why doesn't He just show up in the sky, and manifest Himself? Let's settle it once and for all! Why wouldn't He do that?" I think: "Well, that's a really good question." I wonder what might be a good way to do that?

I mean, what if God became flesh...and actually walked on the Earth? (That would be pretty good.) And what if He, for hundreds of years, sent prophets to say, "By the way, God's going to do that! Don't miss it! He is going to do that." And what if in that moment in history, to make sure nobody missed that, He did all kinds of crazy things like—I don't know—what if a teenage girl woke up one morning and she was pregnant without ever having sexual relations with a man? (That would be pretty dramatic!) And what if, when He was born, He did something like send a bunch of angels into the sky to announce it? And what about a wondrous, miraculous star? What about some magi from the East that would come, and it would be so impressive that even King Herod would sit up and take notice? (That would be pretty good.)

And what if, when He grew up, there was a forerunner whose only job was to keep pointing at Him and say, "There He is; there He is! The prophets have said for hundreds of years, and there He is, right there. Don't miss Him!" (That would be helpful.) And what if He not only claimed to be God, but actually demonstrated Himself to be God? What if he did crazy things like walk on water...calm the sea...feed five thousand with a few loaves and fish? What if the lame were made to walk and, I don't know, the blind to see...maybe even raise the dead to life? And what if these were done in city after city after city in front of hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of

people? (That seems like it would be helpful.) And what if, when He was executed, it actually became dark in the middle of the day across the land for three hours, just to send a message? And what if He actually claimed, “Even if you crucify Me—by the way—three days later I will rise from the dead?” And He did and actually appeared to over five hundred people at one time, just to validate His claim. It seems to me, if God were to do something like that, wouldn’t everyone be convinced?

And yet, amazingly, even people in the First Century chose not to believe. Why? Because people see what they want to see! If my worldview is such that I’m determined to indulge the flesh, that I despise authority, that I want to convince myself that there will be no judgment at the end, I’m free to live as I please. Then I create a worldview through which I view everything—and I simply see what I want to see.

That’s what Peter is saying about these false teachers. So, as believers we know that, and it affects the way we live our lives.

Cara: Bryan, Peter is really issuing a wakeup call here. We need to remember the truth, especially when we're exposed and vulnerable to so many lies.

Bryan: Yeah, this is serious business. As a pastor, I see it every day. I see the devastation in people's lives because they believe the lies. So, it is a wakeup call. The stakes are high.

Cara: So, remembering the truth then is probably something that's very important to pass on to our kids. If they see it in our actions, it'll make much more of an impact on them.

Bryan: That's absolutely true, but they're not going to see it in our actions unless we understand and believe it. I see this all the time. Parents have to understand the truth. They have to live the truth before they can teach their kids the truth. That's usually where the breakdown is. You really can't teach and live what you don't understand. So, it's a big job for parents.

Cara: Would that be like living with one foot in the world and the other one saying, “Well, don't do this, don't do this.” But then the parents are continuing to ...

Bryan: I think that's pretty common. I think kids figure it out. So however, the parents are living, the kids are going to pick up the value system and follow accordingly. [Right.]

Arnie: So, Bryan, you made a good point in that even people in Jesus' time, they mocked Jesus, just like people do today. And I know as a father, if someone was making fun of my kid, I would be furious. And I just, I can't imagine how God must have felt with all that power at his fingertips. He could just clap his hands and wipe all those people out.

Bryan: And so, it is hard to imagine. All of us that are parents know how we feel about our kids and what it must be like for God to listen to people rebel and mock and make fun. I think of the same thing with the church. The church is the bride of Christ. You know, criticize me all you want, but when you criticize my bride, I'm probably going to put a stop to that. So, it reminds us God's patience and God's mercy is just incredible; in some ways it's almost unbelievable. None of us would put up with a fraction of what God puts up with, as people mock and make fun of and reject his son.

Arnie: So, we need to remember that this mocking someday is going to come to an end, and there'll be a judgment. But in the meantime, we need to be constantly aware of opportunities that we can have to share Jesus Christ, even with these mockers.

Bryan: Yeah, so I think that's exactly right. They're not the enemy. They're victims of the enemy. They're people Jesus died for. They're people just like me that need a Savior. I always want to look at my heart and make sure that my heart hasn't turned ugly or angry at people Jesus has called me to reach.

Arnie: It's interesting that these false teachers were mocking the return of Christ. Why that?

Bryan: Yeah, so it is interesting. You're only talking about what, three decades and some change after the ascension of Christ. So, it hadn't been that long. But I think the reason is if Jesus isn't coming back, then there's no accountability. There's no judgment. And so, it gives them a license to live as they please. But what we know is, at the end of the day, the truth wins. Jesus is coming back and he will ultimately be the conquering king.

Cara: I know that scoffers have always existed. I am a former scoffer myself. [Me too.] Yeah. It's hard to admit that - it stinks. I hate that. But I don't know that I had a disdain for Christ. I just was angry.

Arnie: You had a disdain for the followers.

Cara: I don't know what I disdained, but I was disdaining, okay. But I do feel like there's a disdain for Christ that's growing. Do you think that's because of all the media platforms that are available, and that mocking is just going to get louder and louder?

Bryan: Yeah, so that's a great question. So, I think certainly media platforms have made it possible to get the message out louder, more broadly. But I also think in America, we're becoming more and more secular and I do think the mocking is becoming greater and greater. I think other places of the world that's going the other direction. But I think for us as Americans, it is changing, and I do think it's going to get probably worse before it gets better. Secularism, in many ways, is becoming our national religion.

Cara: I noticed though that a lot of my disdain was because I had a false impression of what I thought a Christian was, or maybe because somebody representing Christ wasn't acting Christ-like. I think the best way is, I try to represent Jesus to our culture by just living differently, by leading just a more quiet, disciplined life, where you look for opportunities to share His love.

Bryan: Yeah. So, I think that is right. As long as what people hear in that is not passivity, and I know you know this, but to be proactive, so not just quietly doing our own thing, but actively seeking to create pockets of flourishing, to make a difference in our communities or schools or homes, in a way that gets people's attention, creates opportunities to share the Gospel.

