

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

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Many of you are aware Stephen Hawking died. He was a very interesting story—overcame significant limitations and in many ways lived a very courageous life - a remarkable intellect. There are so many things about his story that are quite impressive, and yet on the other hand, his story is a very tragic, sad story. How could you have seen and discovered and spent your whole life admiring the wonder of the universe, and miss the fact that God created it? What is the option? The universe self-created? The problem with Stephen Hawking wasn't his intellect—he was brilliant. The problem was you see what you want to see. He was determined to be his own god. He was determined to live life on his terms. He was convinced, at the end of the story, there is no God; there is no judgment. You live and you die, and he saw everything through that lens. “You see what you want to see!”

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.

He goes on in Verse 6: We talked about water...and by water...

...through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. (NASB 2 Peter 3:6)

So, the argument of the false teachers, is the idea of Jesus coming back and they are being judged is ridiculous! “We see no evidence of that!” So, Peter is reminding them of something he has already told them. In Chapter Two he said, “Hey, remember God judged the angels. Don't forget Noah and the flood. Don't forget Sodom and Gomorrah.” Now he is just bringing back a summary that there are times in history where God intervened with judgment, to remind people today He is serious about this. Just because God hasn't rained down hellfire and brimstone on people today doesn't mean God is apathetical or indifferent about sin. God has demonstrated that in history.

Verse 7:

But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

So now the reminder: Jesus is coming back, and there will be a judgment day. People will be held accountable. In this case, when he says the ungodly will be destroyed, it doesn't mean annihilated. He used the exact same word in Verse Six, that when the flood of Noah's day came, it destroyed the world. It didn't annihilate the world. Noah and his family landed on dry land and God started over. It's the same word. It just means judgment.

Now we struggle with this in our culture. The more we marginalize God, the more we move God out, the more we create a vacuum into which evil moves. And as long as we convince ourselves at the end of the day there's no accountability, there's no judgment, then people are free to do as they please—because there will be no final accountability. We even feel this when people go into places and kill lots of people and then they kill themselves. And people in our culture [kind of] feel cheated by that. We wanted the bad guy arrested and tried and punished in some way. And we as a culture feel cheated because we didn't get that chance. But we as Christians understand that nobody gets away with anything. At the end of the day there is judgment; there is accountability. God will settle the score. God will make things right again. So, as believers we know that, and it affects the way we live our lives.

Verse 8:

But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (Vs. 8-9)

Peter reminds them that, “Yes, it’s true; Jesus has not returned yet.” At that point, thirty to forty years after His ascension, the mockers are already saying He’s not coming back. Now we’re two thousand years removed from that, and it would be easy for the mockers to say this idea of Jesus coming back, and there being ultimate accountability is just silly. It’s like science fiction; it’s ridiculous!

But Peter reminds us, “Hey, wait a minute here. God’s timetable is not the same as our timetable.” We think of a long life as seventy years...eighty years...but God is eternal. God’s not on the same timeline as we are. And what may seem like a long delay to us may not be much to God. A day is like a thousand years. It’s a verse that has been misused in a lot of ways, but in this case, in this context, it’s just simply saying God’s timetable and our timetable are really different.

But then he goes on to say, “But by the way, this is what is really happening. The reason God is delayed, the reason Jesus hasn’t returned yet, is not because He is slow. It is not because He is not going to keep His promise. It’s not because He is apathetic or indifferent about sin. It’s because He is longsuffering; He is patient; He desires that no one perish. Therefore, He waits in order that all might come to repentance.” God waits. Even though people on earth mock Him...laugh at Him... deny Him; they do evil in His face; they do all they can to offend Him, and yet rather than stepping in and dealing with it, He waits. Why does He wait? He waits in order that people might repent and experience His salvation.

I think all of us have those moments where we’re just worn out; we’re hurt, and we long for the return of Christ. “Let’s just be done with this and let’s move on to the new Heaven and the new Earth—because it’s going to be paradise forever! We all have those moments. I have those moments, and I wish Jesus would just come back today. And then I remember. But wait a minute. I have people in my life I deeply care about, and if Jesus came back today, they would be lost forever. Then I rethink that, and I say, “Jesus, wait a minute...one more day...one more day!”

Hundreds of people in churches all around the world will come to faith in Jesus. These are people that, if Jesus would have returned yesterday, they would have been lost forever. But out of His patience and His grace and His mercy, He held off one more day. And around the world today, hundreds will come to know Jesus as Savior, and they will spend forever in paradise with Jesus. Why? Because Jesus waited one more day! God isn’t like an angry judge, waiting to whack people. He’s like the father in the story of the prodigal son. Day after day after day he waits, and he looks to the horizon and he wonders, “Will this be the day that my son finally comes home?” He’s not wanting to whack him. He’s not wanting to punish him. He is wanting to love him; he is wanting to hug him. He just wants his son to come home. And so, he waits—he waits one more day!

There are people, if Jesus had come back yesterday, you would be lost forever...you’d be lost forever! I just want to appeal to you, “What are you waiting for...what are you waiting for? Don’t presume upon the grace and mercy of God. There is a judgment day coming; He’s waiting. He doesn’t want any to perish. He wants you to experience His gift of salvation.”

Perhaps some of you have just never understood that actually God did become flesh. He died on a cross in payment for your sin, was buried and rose again, and He offers you salvation freely, as a gift to be received by faith. It doesn’t matter what you’ve done, doesn’t matter what’s been done to you. Jesus didn’t come back yesterday. Maybe it was just for you. I just want to ask

you again, “What are you waiting for?” For all of us there is this sobering reality: the false teachers are real, and they are powerful. They are deceitful and they have a highly effective marketing campaign—and they lead Christians astray at an alarming rate.

You were convinced it would make you happy. This is where life would be found. Now you are stuck in the mud. It’s not what you thought it was going to be. At some point you have to be honest enough to say, “Yeah, I got deceived; I got off the path. I chased something that I thought would make me happy. Now I’m miserable.” Again, I’m not asking who you pretend to be when you put on your mask and come to church. I’m not asking who you pretend to be on social media. I’m asking who you in the middle of the night are, lying in your bed and you can’t sleep, and you’re hurt, you’re confused, you’re wounded. You feel the shame and the guilt, the disappointment and the struggle, and you wonder, “How did this happen...how did this happen?” Some of you wonder, “Will I ever make it back on the path of freedom in life?”

As I said, some of you are turning to drugs and alcohol. It’s your way of coping with it. You think you can handle it, but you know deep down you’re not handling it. It’s getting out of control. Some of you have turned to pornography. It started with a little curiosity; now it’s out of control and you can’t stop. Your days are filled with lies and deceit, with cover-up. It’s exhausting and, honestly you wonder in your heart, “Will I ever know another day of freedom?”

It starts by being honest enough to say, “Hey, the false teachers lured me off the path. I went down the wrong path and now I have a mess.” Maybe you are ready to be done with that. Maybe you’re ready to face the reality of that and say, “You know, I’m done with that. I’m ready to get back on the path of life. I’m ready to know freedom again. I’m ready to confess my sin and repent of this. I want to take the first step to getting back to the freedom that Jesus offers.”

Cara: For the person, Bryan, who's been stuck in false teaching and they want to get back to true freedom, what are the next steps for them?

Bryan: Yeah, so great question. So, people typically can't do it alone in isolation. So, it's together in community with your local church, however that looks to you. But I think the steps are confession, because usually there's sin involved, which literally means to agree with God, repentance, which is to turn a different direction or to change your mind. And then I think as we've been talking about, actively pursuing the truth or you're just going to end up back in the same lies. So, in some ways, this goes back to what we talked about in Second Peter Chapter One, back to those steps that are the steps to growth that we talked about.

Arnie: It's so true that nobody gets away with anything. God sees it all, but for me, I'm so glad that God's patient and that he waits, and He waited for me.

Bryan: That's sobering to think about, is that every day God waits, there are thousands of people around the world that come to Christ, that if He'd had come yesterday would have been lost. So sometimes we say, why doesn't God do something? It's like, well, He is, He's patiently waiting today because a lot of people today will come to Christ and in His right timing, He'll return.

Cara: You ever watch a movie and the character has a problem and every time there's an opportunity to fix the problem, they just walk right by it. [Yeah.] That was God coming to me

throughout times in my life, and me just walking right past Him and He was so patient with me. I'm just so thankful for that. So, is that why Peter is so emphatic about when he says, "but do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day"?"

Bryan: Yeah. So, he's saying, "Don't go to sleep. Just because Jesus didn't come back yesterday doesn't mean He's not coming back." I mean, you think it's all relative. Ten years is a long time if you're only going to live to be 80, but in the scope of hundreds of thousands of years, not so much.

Cara: We know God is patient and loving, but His patience is not going to last forever. And that spurs me on to wanting to reach as many people as I can for Christ.

Bryan: Yeah. So, one of the things I love about you Cara is you have a heart for lost people, and you live that way. So, Peter says, "Don't fall asleep. There's work to do. Jesus is coming back."

Arnie: Bryan, I think people sometimes get confused about the word repent and what it means. Can you go over that for us?

Bryan: Sure. So, it does get confusing. So, let's start with confession, which literally means to agree with God. So, when I sin, I'm agreeing with God that's sin, even so far as to say, I was trying to be my own god, and this is the need I was trying to meet. The more specific, the better. So, repentance then is a change of mind or it's a turning in a different direction. Sometimes I like to talk about putting a stake in the ground and go a different direction. And the reason I like that is because a lot of Christians get caught in the sin, "Sorry", sin, "Sorry", sin, "Sorry", cycle. And at some point, there has to be, if I'm going to confess, if I'm going to agree with God, this is sin, then I put a stake in the ground, and I say it's got to stop. And I'm willing to do whatever's necessary to make sure it stops, and I go a different direction, and that's repentance.

Arnie: Do you need to repent more than once for a sin that's out of your life?

Bryan: It's out of your life? (It's out of your life.) I don't think so. I think once you've dealt with it, it's more important to move on, to believe God tells the truth and to move forward. I don't see the value of going back and repenting over something that's in the past.

Cara: To me asking God for forgiveness for the same thing over and over, would indicate that you don't believe God's telling the truth when He says, I'm going to take that from you. [Yeah.] Is that a good way to view that?

Bryan: Yeah, I think it is. I think accepting God's forgiveness and moving forward. I think where it could get misunderstood, maybe Arnie is, if we're talking about something from my distant past that I've never faced, I've never dealt with, I've never gone back to someone. That's different than if I've confessed it, if I've repented, if I've accepted God's forgiveness, then move forward.

Arnie: Be thankful.

Bryan: Be thankful.

Cara: Where does repentance then fall in the life of someone who's a believer?

Bryan: Well, I think since we continue to sin as believers, it's an important part of it, because it is continuing to address sin in our journey to become more like Christ. So, one of the ways to think of it is, all of us as we sit here today, have areas of sin, that if we were more mature, we would see it, but we're not. So, the closer we get to the light, the more the light exposes the rats that are still hidden in the shadows. So, I confess, I repent, and it's a lifelong process to become more like Christ.

Cara: What is it about the word "repentance" that scares somebody that you're trying to witness to?

Bryan: Yeah, so I think it is a scary word, and maybe it's because of things they've heard in the past or how it was said, context where it was said. But I think for a lot of people, they think this means the end of my fun. This means the end of my freedom. This means the end of life as I know it. And it goes back to the lie of the enemy from Genesis Three: "God's not as good as you think He is. And if you surrender to Him, all the fun's over", and I think that that's what repentance means to a lot of unbelievers.