Exiles: Faithfully Present in a Foreign Land
38—New Heavens and New Earth 03 Aug 2026
2 Peter 3:11–13 J-T Richards

Introduction

In 1972 a movie was released that inspired fear in an entire generation. The premise of the movie is a young woman named Patty was largely a good person. She attended church, didn't hurt anyone, loved her husband. Then one morning she wakes up to discover her husband was missing and the radio reported that "millions of people just disappeared". In the movie the "rapture" had taken place and Patty had been *left behind*.

Then comes the plot twist: Patty awakens to discover it had all been a dream. Then comes another plot twist: she awakens the next day to find the rapture really has taken place and her husband is really gone and she really has been left behind.

Wikipedia describes the film as an "evangelical Christian horror film". The producers of this movie said their purpose was evangelistic; they wanted non-Christians to recognize they had limited time. The Lord would return like a thief in the night and they'd *better be ready*. The future return of Christ was a fearful thing and fear is a powerful motivator.

When we read 2 Peter and his depiction of the return of Christ, is this the sort of response Peter seeks to elicit from us? Yes, he writes of judgment and the universe "passing away with a roar" and the stars and planets being "burned up and dissolved", but is Peter's purpose to instill fear in us? Does Peter write of the return of Christ as a thing to be feared, or is there a very different response intended? We're in 2 Peter 3, starting in verse 11.

> 2 Pet 3:11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.
>
> 2 Peter 3:11–13

Holiness and Godliness

Peter continues his thought from verse 10. He urges his readers to not overlook this one fact: the Lord is timeless. A day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. As we saw last week this doesn't mean God experiences time *differently*; it means God does not *experience* time. He exists in his eternal present and time, being a thing he created, is directly and immediately available to him, all at once. He is simply present in all of time, all at the same time, while also not being constrained by it in any way.

Peter then says God is not slow to fulfill his promise—his singular, ultimate promise. This promise is the fullness of our salvation. As he put in the beginning of the letter, we become partakers of the divine nature. This reaches its fullness in the resurrection when the Lord Jesus returns. This return is known as the day of the Lord and that day will come like

a thief—unexpectedly and unannounced. At that time there will be final judgment and he says the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn and the earth and everything done on the earth will be exposed.

Peter then applies this dissolution of creation. Often when we think of eschatology, which refers to the last days or "the end times", we tend to apply it evangelistically. That is, we think of talking about the end times in a way that emphasizes the response of unbelievers. For many, the old Larry Norman song, produced in 1969, continues to influence our thinking:

> A man and wife asleep in bed
> She hears a noise and turns her head, he's gone
> I wish we'd all be ready
> Two men walking up a hill
> One disappears and one's left standing still
> I wish we'd all been ready
> There's no time to change your mind
> The Son has come and you've been left behind
>
> Larry Norman, "I Wish We'd All Been Ready", verse 2

It's not hard to see how this song influenced the movie "A Thief in the Night". This is how the modern understanding of end times is usually applied. The warning to be prepared for the Lord's return is largely directed to non-Christians. "You don't know when Jesus will come, so you'd better get ready" is the idea. There is truth to this. The Lord is patient, but he will not wait forever. Judgment is, in fact, coming. Scripture is filled with warnings of judgment for those who persist in their unbelief. This is not Peter's application of the return of Christ, however—at least not in the way you might be thinking.

Notice what he says: "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved"—that's final judgment—"what sort of people ought *you* to be in lives of holiness and godliness. For Peter, writing to believers who were suffering for their faith in Christ and were being harmed by the lies of false teachers, the reality of coming judgment should cause them to pursue lives of holiness and godliness.

These two words are significant. One lexicon glosses holiness as "the quality possessed by things and persons that could approach a divinity" (BDAG, ἅγιος). Your character ought to be one that reflects the character of God himself, as one who is fit to approach him. This is the status granted to us in Christ; it ought to be the pursuit of our lives for our lives to match our status. The day of the Lord is coming; this ought to compel us to live as those fit to approach a holy God.

The second word is godliness. Another lexicon glosses it as "behavior reflecting correct religious beliefs and attitudes" (εὐσέβεια, Louw & Nida). We ought to live in a manner that reflects our holiness, our right standing before God, a standing that grants us access to God. And we ought to live in a manner that reflects our beliefs about God. In other words, Peter is emphasizing the reality of the coming of the Lord ought to compel us to live as though it's true! African scholar Tokunboh Adeyemo put it so well:

> The Yoruba of Western Nigeria call a Christian *onigbagbo* ['one who has received faith']. Faith is regarded as a gift that brings salvation. But accepting

> this gift has consequences, as a saying that arose among the first generation of Yoruba Christians makes clear: 'we do not receive faith without it taking something away from us. It will take away sorcery, idolatry, adultery, witchcraft and the like'. …Expectation of Christ's return has always served as a moral detergent.
>
> Tokunboh Adeyemo, Africa Bible Commentary

God saves us and begins the process of transforming us. This transformation is, as Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 3:18, "from one degree of glory to another"—until we reach our salvation in its fullness, and are glorified with the Lord Jesus at his coming. Until that day, our expectation of his return ought to be "a moral detergent"—it ought to motivate us and compel us to live for the Lord. This is what it means to live lives of holiness and godliness. We live as those who have been rescued by the Lord and who believe he is who he says he is.

Waiting and Hastening

Peter continues his thought. We ought to live in a manner that reflects our true identity in Christ, "waiting for and hastening the coming day of God". Waiting here doesn't mean to just sit tight and bide your time. To wait is to wait *expectantly*. This is how it's used throughout the New Testament with regard to the Lord's return. In Luke 12 Jesus warns his disciples to be ready, to be vigilant, *to wait* for his return.

> Lk 12:35 "Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, 36 and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. 38 If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants!
>
> Luke 12:35

"Keep your lamps burning" means "keep the lights on". Don't go to bed. Stay dressed, and stay up, alert, ready for his return. Jesus clearly does not mean we should literally not sleep. He means we must always be ready for his coming. Peter says we should wait for the coming day of God. We should live expectantly that he will come again, in anticipation of his return. That's the point of being awake during "the second watch" or "the third"—that's long after others have gone asleep and before most would rise for the day. The point is *readiness*, eager expectation.

For now, we experience what feels like a delay. The false teachers were playing off this very natural feeling we have. We are finite and limited by time. It seems the Lord is delaying his return. The saints under the altar in heaven feel this, too, as they cry out in prayer, "How long, Lord?" Their—and our—experience of time is not definitive, however. The Lord is not *slow* to fulfill his promise.

As we wait for his coming, it feels like it's taking a long time, and taking a long time sure feels like a delay, like he's being slow. He's not being slow. God needs time in the sense

that he works out his purposes in time. He acts outside of time, yet from our perspective things happen in a specific order. Tuesday comes after Monday and 2026 came after 2025. If we want to weed the garden, we need time to weed the garden. This isn't the sense in which God "needs" time.

He needs time in the sense that he uses time to accomplish his purposes. He could do it all at once; we cannot snap our fingers and cause the garden to be immediately weed-free. God could, yet God prefers to use means. This necessarily requires that he works in time, doing one thing and then the next. This is, of course, from our perspective. If God is doing something on Tuesday, we—not he—must first experience Monday, just like if God was going to raise Jesus, Jesus must first experience death. This is how the created world works, and if God is going to act in the created world, he does so according to the requirements he built into his creation, namely, *time*.

Because we exist in time, we must wait for the coming day of God. Remember that God exists in an eternal present. Just as Jesus *is*, right now, before Abraham *was*, so God *is* right now and *is* in a million years. He is I Am Who I Am. He does not wait in the sense that we wait. He simply acts in his eternal present before the world began, and we experience his singular act as a series of actions spread out over time. We wait, and we wait eagerly.

Peter adds another word. Not only ought we to be the sort of people who live lives of holiness and godliness, waiting eagerly for the coming day of God, we *hasten* the coming day of God. We *speed it up*, making it come *sooner*. We what, now? The Greek word means to be in a hurry or "to cause something to happen or come into being by exercising special effort" (BDAG, σπεύδω).

Holy what-is-the-context-of-this, Batman! Is Peter suggesting we can hurry up the coming day of the Lord? How!? Well, it appears that by living lives of holiness and godliness we move up the day. Again, how? Follow his logic. Peter says God is timeless; a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day. He says God is patient toward you, his chosen ones, and is not wishing that any of you should perish, but that all of you should reach repentance.

Our holiness and our godliness are necessary parts of God's work in this world. He will, as Jesus himself said, not lose a single one:

> Jn 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to
> me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my
> own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who
> sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up
> on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on
> the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on
> the last day."
>
> John 6:37–40

Peter wasn't making it up when he said God is patient toward you, not wishing that any of you should perish, but that all of you should reach repentance. He was getting this directly from Jesus himself. Who is "you" in 2 Peter 3? Directly, it is the believers in these five provinces, and by extension, it is all those the Father has given Jesus, those of whom the Father wills that none should be lost.

Speeding Up

As we pursue holiness and godliness, we are being more effective witnesses to the power of the Lord Jesus. As he urged them in his first letter, they must keep their conduct among the nations honorable—they must live lives of holiness and godliness. As they pursue such holiness and godliness, unbelievers see their good works. The outcome of this is God raises up opportunities for the believer to speak gospel truth, to explain the reason for the hope that is within them. As we saw throughout 1 Peter, our manner of living is an essential part of the mission of God in this world.

In 2 Peter we see the importance of right theology. We must hold to the faith that has been delivered to us by the apostles and we must reject false teaching. This is essential because God is working to fulfill his ultimate promise, which is the outcome of our sanctification, of being made holy. God has granted to us the status of holy and God is working in us to make us actually holy. The reality of coming judgment motivates us to pursue holiness and godliness. This glad participation in the process of pursuing holiness and godliness hastens the coming day of God. It hastens the end. How? New Testament scholar Douglas Moo explains.

> By connecting what he says here about hastening the coming of the day of God with his exhortation in verse 11b, Peter also suggests that the holy living of God's people is a way to speed up the eschatalogical timetable. And we can include evangelism; recall Jesus' words: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14). Finally, we may also add to the list the prayers of God's people, for we have been taught to pray "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10).
>
> Douglas Moo, NIVAC

By living faithfully, by being faithfully present, by holding to the truth once delivered, by pursuing holiness and godliness, and by engaging in faithful witness to those in our spheres of influence, we can hasten the return of Christ. We ought to cling tightly to what we have received and live it out. A life that follows Jesus is a life that points the world to Christ. By doing so we hasten the return of Christ. We see Peter make a similar point in the book of Acts.

> Acts 3:19 "Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,
> 20 that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that
> he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, 21 whom heaven must receive
> until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth
> of his holy prophets long ago."
>
> Acts 3:19–21

Notice the connection to faith in the Lord and the future "times of refreshing". This is what Jesus meant in Matthew 24.

> Mt 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the
> whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.
>
> Matthew 24:14

Again notice the connection to the fullness of those chosen in Christ coming to faith and the coming of Christ. All those the Father has given the Son will come to him; not a single one will be lost. This is what the saints under the altar in heaven are told.

> Rev 6:9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. 10 They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" 11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.
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> Revelation 6:9–1

Using the all-or-nothing hyperbole of apocalyptic literature, John means that all those who die in faith are counted as faithful martyrs. John is saying that when the full plan of God is fulfilled, then the end will come. When the mission of God on earth is complete, which is the salvation of his people, then the day of God will come.

Remember the immediate context in 2 Peter 3! Peter urges his readers to remember this one fact: a day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a single day. Therefore the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise but is patient toward you, not wishing that any of you should perish, but that all of you should reach repentance. To say this another way, the mission of God in this world is unstoppable. It cannot fail. It moves forward, *inexorably*, toward God's intended purpose. This purpose is in verse 13: "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells".

New Creation

We looked at the singular promise last week. It is the fullness of partaking of the divine nature, as he says in chapter 1. All the promises of God lead to this. Our final glorification in the resurrection is *the promise* of God. According to his promise, to this, the completion of our salvation, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth.

When Peter says "heavens"—plural—he doesn't mean that place where God's presence is most profoundly revealed now. He doesn't mean "heaven" where all the saints who have gone to be with the Lord are right now. The plural heavens means the universe, the created cosmos. There's earth, and then there are the heavens—the rest of creation. Peter says according to God's promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth.

This is the promise we read of in the prophets. In Isaiah 65 God promises,

> Is 65:17 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind."
>
> Isaiah 65:17

He says again in the next chapter,

Is 66:22 "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain
before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. 23 From
new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to
worship before me, declares the LORD."

Isaiah 66:22–23

The apostle John sees this in his vision of the end.

Rev 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and
the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy
city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride
adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and
they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He
will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither
shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things
have passed away."

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things
new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:1–5

When God says, "I am making all things new" he means *all things*. We, of course, will be resurrected. Our bodies will be immortal and we will be glorified. In Peter's words, we will partake of the divine nature *fully*. It starts when God first saves us, and we continue to partake of the divine nature more and more. When he comes again, we will be utterly transformed. As I've said before, I don't fully comprehend what this means but it sounds so wonderful I cannot wait! We will have perfect bodies, but the earth itself will also be transformed. In Romans 8 Paul tells us creation itself longs for the redemption of *our* bodies. Look at what he says.

Rom 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth
comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits
with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was
subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope
21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and
obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the
whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

Romans 8:18–22

The physical world longs for the fullness of our salvation, for our resurrection, for it means creation will be set free. The created world longs to be set free from its bondage to corruption. This will happen when the Lord Jesus returns to re-create the world.

This is our hope. This is what we long for. This is the very end for which God created the world. Notice what John sees in his vision of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven: the dwelling place of God is with man. The world must be made fit for human habitation, and for God to dwell among his people. When Adam was kicked out of the garden the earth

itself was cursed and so the cursed earth was a dwelling fit for a fallen, sinful people. It is the place where sin and death reign. It must all be made new, for God's redeemed humanity will be free of sin and death.

This world, the entire *universe*, will be re-created and will be a place of endless life, a place of never-ending prosperity, of joy and happiness. God himself will dwell on earth with his people forever. Heaven comes to earth. Rather than something to be feared, the return of Christ is our hope, the very thing we long for. We await his return with eager expectation. We long for the fullness of his promise.

Application

Because the Lord Jesus is coming again and is coming with judgment that will purify the created world, we are compelled to pursue holiness and godliness. It is the only logical response to our salvation. Over and over again the New Testament writers point to what God in Christ through his Spirit has done as the basis for our response to it. Paul's letter to the Ephesians illustrates this quite well. For the first three chapters Paul lays out the goodness of the gospel, of all that God has done for us in Christ, without a single command. Paul makes it very clear what God has done. What is the right response to this? Ephesians 4:1.

> Eph 4:1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called…
>
> Ephesians 4:1

We see the same thing in Romans. For eleven chapters Paul proclaims the gospel to the Christians in Rome, reminding them of the power of God to save them. What is the right response to this truth? Romans 12:1.

> Rom 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
>
> Romans 12:1

The right response to the truth of God in Christ is a life pursuing holiness and godliness. The context of this makes this even more profound. By pursuing holiness and godliness we hasten the coming day of God. We hasten through our faithful presence. Our faithful presence requires living for the Lord and it requires that we are always ready to give the reason for the hope that is within us. That is, we must always be ready to proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus to anyone who asks us, as Peter says in his first letter.

Peter warns that judgment is coming, and this warning is offered as a motivation for evangelism, but not in the way we usually think. Rather than the return of Christ proclaimed through a "evangelical Christian horror movie", the return of Christ compels followers of Christ to faithful living. Faithful living includes faithful *presence*, and faithful presence results in faithful *proclamation*.

As we saw in 1 Peter, we don't need to force the conversation. We trust the Lord for opportunities to share the good news of Jesus. Before we can share the good news, those

around us must first *see* the good news. To say this another way, if the unbelievers in our spheres of influence do not see the truth of the gospel lived out in us, why on earth would they care what we have to say? It is when they *see* the truth of the gospel in us that they can *hear* the gospel proclaimed.

This is where the early church is helpful to us. They lived lives of patience, of trusting the Lord and his timing. They understood that all of time was in his hand and he could and would act in the time of his choosing. They sought to live faithfully, whether working in the fields, or in a shop, whether a craftsman or a laborer, whether they were doing laundry or paying their taxes, whether they were influential or largely nobodies. Alan Kreider wrote the early church and their approach to the mission of God, that of saving people from sin and death.

> The most reliable means of communicating the attractiveness of the faith to others and enticing things further was the Christians' character, bearing, and behavior.
>
> Alan Kreider, "The Patient Ferment"

In this second letter of Peter, Peter has been warning the Christians in these five provinces about the dangers of false teachers. He has not forgotten the mission of God in all this. In fact, his desire to see the nations come to faith in Christ is the reason he wrote this letter, for their faithfulness *in all things, including doctrine* is a necessary part of evangelism. This is why he emphasizes their holiness and godliness. Just as God uses time to accomplish his purposes, so he uses his people to accomplish his purposes.

When the world sees Christians living lives of holiness and godliness, they are drawn to the gospel of Jesus. The reason this attracts people is it reflects the glory of God in the face of Christ. Love for neighbor is an essential part of the mission of God in this world. Love ought to motivate us to follow Christ more faithfully, to live lives undeterred by the hostility of those outside the church, to pursue holiness and godliness as the central passion of our lives.

What we are longing for is coming day of God. We are longing for the return of Christ. We are longing for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. We are long for the Lord himself. We want everyone to know him, so let's live in such a way that reflects this desire.

Each one of us longs for the new earth. We long for a world free of anger and hatred, a world free of racism and sexism, a world free of abuse and scandal. We long for a world free of war and poverty, free of death and violence, free of disease and disaster. It's coming. That world is coming, and the incredible thing is it is this world we currently inhabit. When the Lord Jesus returns he will recreate this world and it will be the world we've always wanted.

You see, the Son of God gave up everything to come to this world, to live in our neighborhood, to experience all that it means to be human in a fallen world. He lived the life we were supposed to live, a life utterly free of sin. Then he died the death we were supposed to die. He moved into our world, so that one day, we could move into *his* world. Church, *it's the same world*, only it's a world that will be purified by the fire of his coming.

What this life is about is getting ready to move into that world. Everything about that world is better. We have the rest of our lives to pursue that world by getting ready for it, and by inviting as many as we can to join us. The coming of Christ is the promise of salvation.

What people want is a "get-rich-quick" scheme for evangelism. That's what the movie "A Thief In the Night" was. Whether it's a tried and true method for presenting the truth of the gospel, or it's a logical argument that refutes skeptics, or something else, people want something that *just works*. A technique. A strategy. What God wants is our holiness and godliness, for through our witness he—*he*—will draw men and women to himself. Jesus promised in John 6 that his mission to save his people cannot fail. Our job is to be faithful witnesses.

Let's be faithfully present.