

2 Peter 3:14-18 14.08.11

Well, that's it, all over for another year.

Keswick Convention – gone.

Summer holiday – gone.

Money – gone. What have I got left to look forward to?

Well, plenty actually! The thing is we just need to know what, for example, there is next year's Keswick Convention. And when we come to our reading, 2 Peter 3:14 (and I want to just focus in on that one verse today) we also need to ask the question, "What have we got to look forward to?" because verse 14 (and our reading today) begins, "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this..." And when we read that verse a moment ago that really should have raised in your minds the burning question, "Looking forward to what?"

But the good news is that the answer is right there in the verses before ours; we are looking forward to the day of God's judgement (verse 12) and then in verse 13 to the new heaven and the new earth – "the home of righteousness".

Now, isn't that something to look forward to? I'm not saying that there aren't plenty of excellent things about this world, but when we got home and turned on the TV and watched the news, what did we see? Riots in London, massacres in Syria, starvation in East Africa; don't you look forward to a new heaven and a new earth where there is no more death and suffering and injustice and illness? Isn't God's promise of creating a "home of righteousness" deeply appealing and inspiring? It is to me, because I can see that this world is broken and spoilt by sin.

So, what should our response be? Well, when you have something to look forward to, you plan for it, you prepare for it. The moment Keswick is over for us, we start looking forward to the Keswick Convention next year.

We book the time off in our diaries. We book our accommodation, we start saving. When it gets closer we gather together the things we need, pack our clothing, check our walking gear, make sure we have our Bibles and our waterproofs – even the sun cream needed to be packed this year! All so that when the time came we were ready for the event that we look forward to so much. And that's how verse 14 of 2 Peter begins; "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this..." this is what you need to do,

How many people do you whose motivation for working is simply to pay for their holidays, or credit card bill, or mortgage? That's why they come into work every day – it makes it worthwhile. But our motivation for living out the Christian life is that we know God has promised us, not a holiday or a HD TV, but a whole new earth, a home of righteousness made possible through Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross.

So, that's our motivation, but what does it mean to live out the Christian life? Well, Peter says that as Christians we should be "spotless and blameless".

Which means? Well, let me ask you, what has been one of the big surprises about this last week's riots? It is the kind of people who have been arrested –people like the 43-year-old organic chef, the 19 year old who recently started work as a steward at an outdoor opera venue in the upmarket London district of Holland Park, the youth worker, the primary school class room assistant, the forklift truck driver and even an 11 year old girl. These are people who do not fit the normal profile we hold of mindless thugs and yobs bent on destruction and theft.

These are people who looked good, but their true hearts have been revealed; they are no longer spotless and blameless individuals; they will now be marked for life with criminal records because of their actions.

But why does Peter use this language with Christians – “spotless and blameless”? Well, it’s not just about good character, it takes us back to the Old Testament sacrificial system where anything offered to God had to be without spot or blemish; Leviticus 22:21, “When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfil a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable.”

In fact when the Old Testament people of God became careless about their animal sacrifices at the temple, God admonishes them through the prophet Malachi, “When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you? says the LORD Almighty.” Malachi 1:8

What we find unacceptable is a primary school staff member, employed to be a role model up in court on charges of rioting and looting because he thought that he would get away with it. What God finds unacceptable are his people who know that there is going to be a day of divine judgement heading towards it as blemished and diseased “living sacrifices” (as Romans 12 describes us), without a care in the world.

No, that is not how the church is to be, look at the picture Paul paints to the Ephesians of what Jesus did for the Church when he died on the cross, “... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.” Ephesians 5:25-27

So, how can we be spotless and blameless?

Our great example is Jesus himself because Peter tells us in his first letter that the only way that we could be redeemed – bought back from sin and death was, “with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

In other words to be the Church Paul describes as we prepare for the Lord’s return we are to model ourselves on Jesus whom Peter describes– we are to grow more like the lamb of God.

If nothing else, the last week has shown us the terrible danger of not providing good and holy role models for our society. Anglican Mainstream pointed out in an email “The young people could see that those who were powerful (including according to them the rich owners of shops) were not accountable and could get away with looting the banking system, or fiddling their expenses, or hacking into mobile phones, or being sexually promiscuous. “If those people can get away with it, why should we not get away with what we can.” They knew the police would not do anything so they took their chance and in great numbers looted their cities.”

Christians are called to be Christ-like – examples, witnesses and role models of something other than a consumer society focused around the individual. If nothing else, that is your calling.

So how are we to do that? How are we to be authentically Christ-like? Well, Peter points us towards Jesus – the lamb without blemish or defect and away from false teachers who he describes in chapter 2 verse 13 as “blots and blemishes, revelling in their pleasures while they feast with you.”

The contrast is stark, it is between following Christ and turning away from Christ.

If we follow Christ and become more like him, then we will be acceptable to God, but if not, if we let every new and false teaching which runs contrary to what God teaches us in the Bible, then we tear the foundations out from under our own lives and that of our society.

Sections of the Church in general and sections of the Anglican church in particular have turned their backs on the Bible, rejected its authority, thus rejecting God's authority and colluded with the secular authorities to play a significant part in our country's moral decline. Anglican Mainstream continue; "The church has been complicit in accepting the undermining of the moral order in education, at schools and in the academy, in its total emphasis on justifying itself by its service of the underprivileged, and in failing to teach clearly about the sanctity of marriage and virginity until marriage.

The state and politicians have systematically undermined the contribution of religion to public life and moral order, stigmatizing religion as oppressive and exclusive and tolerable only in a very limited personal space.

Right and wrong must be embedded in a moral order. We can contribute a secure foundation for such an order. We do not need to claim that the Christian religion is the only foundation for such an order, but we may properly contribute our view." The question we need to ask of ourselves is, "Are we contributing our distinctive Christian voice to our society?" Are we?

You see, the instruction in 2 Peter is not about living morally, or attending church, it is about tackling precisely what we have realised has gone wrong with our society – the foundations.

If we get the foundations of our Christians lives right – if we build on the true and living word of God then with God’s grace we can correct the times we go astray and we can lay solid foundations for our children’s and community’s lives. But if we build on no foundations or the wrong foundations then although we might appear to be moral our personal lives will be unacceptable to God and our society will have no genuine Godly moral compass.

So, as we conclude, in a week of such terrible and reckless violence the second half of verse 14 instructs us to be at peace with God.

Rudyard Kipling’s famous poem “if” is inspiring;
“If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings---nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much:
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And---which is more---you'll be a Man, my son!”

Well, Peter says something similar, but better, he says, “If you can stand firm when all around you are running after foolish false teaching, then you’ll be a man or woman of God and what is more, you will be at peace with God, my son!”

In chapter 2 verses 1 and 3 Peter makes plain the fate of the false teachers; condemnation and then destruction. He says, “But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them— bringing swift destruction on themselves...In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping.”

The key for us in the midst of this world of political correctness is not to be seduced by their attractive lies and go down the same route as those in verse 2; “Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute.”

These three verses contain the stark warning that false teaching is attractive and many will follow it – after all, the false teachers argue, “the Bible is at least 2000 years old, you can’t be sure its all true and, anyway, times have changed”. It all sounds very appealing and many will follow it and because they will repeat its errors to others, they will lead the Gospel of truth into disrepute.

As I have already said, that is the very real danger which faces the church today just as it has faced the Church time and again over the centuries. And it is dangerous because it is the route to God’s condemnation and the destruction of those who exalt it, why? Because it removes the good news from the Gospel.

If there is no good news in the Gospel, if Jesus was just a good man and all we need to do is be good people, according to our own definition of good. If everyone will get into their own heaven when they die, or simply rot to dust then why not do what you want to now?

Who is going to call you to account if not even the Church is teaching about God's judgement any more. So loot the shops, burn the buildings, take a human life, you'll never have to face the consequences. That is the chilling ultimate outcome of our Godless society.

But we can stand against it. We are looking forward to the day of the Lord, we are looking forward to the home of righteousness; the new heaven and the new earth.

Now is not the time to throw our Bibles into the bonfire of vain selfish greed. Now is the moment to stand firm as God's people and live out what we believe, to follow Christ and come to God without spot or blemish and be at peace with him.

Now is when our country needs us to be salt and light in a rotting and dark world and hold out justice, truth, righteousness and yes, mercy, grace and forgiveness which can only be found in Jesus.

When our streets have become war zones, how can we call our country back to peace with one another and with God? Peter tells us in chapter 1 verse 2, he says; "Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."

Nothing else will truly satisfy our desires.