

Part 20: The Joy of Choosing What is Good

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Imagine, if you will, the date is August 6th, 2019, and you're chatting with your neighbor and they ask you the question: "What's your opinion on masks?"

We would probably be extremely confused and after a series of questions we might conclude that we have no real opinion.

Consider how that same question asked today. It seems as if the reason social media exists is to communicate always and only one's answer to that same question. But given the situation we are in, the information we are being provided, and the choices we are having to make, we have been forced to have an opinion and that opinion shapes the choices you make.

Today Peter is going to ask us a question which might seem as out of place as a question on masks in 2019. Yet given the context and the information he's provided in his second letter, it is something which we can no longer afford to have no opinion on.

As we finish second Peter today, Peter lays out some options: burning vs. beauty, purity vs. punishment and instability vs. security. But just as it is with all the other options you face, behind them lays the shaping reality of opinions.

To actually choose which option you want is to be forced to have an opinion on holiness and godly conduct. To choose between two restaurants you must have an opinion of food. To choose between two houses you must have an opinion on location. And to choose between the options Peter gives you today you must have an opinion on the nature of God's call to holiness through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The big idea we are going to see today in the conclusion of Peter's letter is this: **The gospel frees us to choose and to experience what is better forever.**

We are going to see this in three ways today. First Peter is going to pose a question to all of us. In verses 11-13 we are going to see **The Question of Holiness**. Peter is then going to answer this for us in two parts. In verses 14-16 he is going to give his first answer: **The Diligence of Holiness**, and in verses 17-18 he is going to give his second answer: **The Delight of Holiness**.

First let's understand the nature of Peter's question as we read **2 Peter 3:11-13**.

So if you remember what immediately preceded this passage last week, Peter was confronting those in the church who denied Jesus' return and the day of judgment. He concluded by reminding us that one day the earth and her works will be exposed in the fire of judgment.

Peter is not warning us that some might miss out. He's not cautioning people of the dangers of not finding a purpose, or living a sub-optimal existence. He is warning them of the eternal nature of judgment and salvation.

To prepare his people for this day you would think that he would ask questions like this: Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people will you be in lives of faith and confession? Or perhaps, what kind of people will you be in lives of charity and good works?

Or since this is coming, what will the object of your prayers be? Still for others we might think him to ask what kind of people we might be in theological and eschatological study? But instead he asks us what kind of people we might be in lives of holiness and godly conduct. These are two attributes which express an internal and an external display of the transformation of the God who saved us.

This is our first point today: **The Question of Holiness.**

I wonder if how many of us think as highly of holiness as Peter does here? In a survival situation, there lots of things you will have to do but a good survivalist prioritizes first of all: food, shelter and water. If you had to make a list of essential resources necessary to living where would you rank holiness and godly conduct?

Now there is an interesting divide in our minds when it comes to talking about living holy and godly lives. If you're a non-Christian, or maybe a new Christian in here, you might hear this and have this confirm your default assumption of works based righteousness: that if we live good and holy lives we might by the quantity of our works tip the scales in our favor and avoid judgment.

It is true here that Peter is calling believers to act in holy ways in light of the end, but as we will see in our second point, Christianity is not salvation by good works (at least not your works).

But despite how pervasive this mindset is, we often fall into another trap on the Christian end of the spectrum. We tend to think that because we have salvation by grace through faith, holiness and godly lives are more optional window dressing than they are essentials to the faith.

But in light of judgment Peter leverages the significance of this question: What kind of people will you be when it comes to the internal holiness of your heart and the external godly actions of your life?

It is as if Peter knows our hearts that he now wakes us up to why this question is so important: **2 Peter 3:12-13.**

When I was touring colleges I visited Oregon State University. Now I'm a big sports fan, but I'm not a huge baseball fan. But I did know enough about baseball to know that the Oregon State baseball team had won the college world series the season before hand.

So while this college student was giving me a tour, he reserved for me the baseball stadium. It was one of the last things he was going to show me. And he built up to it as we were walking up: "Do you like sports," he said. "I do." "Well do you like baseball?" And I said to him, "Not really."

He looked totally dejected as he said, "Ah, well the Beavers just won the college world series and this is their stadium." I shrugged and he disappointedly continued with his tour.

I wonder how many of us view Christianity through this lens. We think that at some point when it comes to paying our tuition, the tour guide will pull back the veil and try to show us the cost is worth it because of some dinky northwest sports ball team.

But here we see the wonder of the gospel in Peter's message. Peter here is presenting the possibility of an option that we cannot merely shrug towards. The way in which he spurs us to consider our conduct is not only by presenting the possibility of judgment but by holding up promise of something we cannot meet with a shrug of apathy.

But look at what Peter says: **2 Peter 3:13**. Here we have according to God's promise the joy of the New Heavens and the New Earth where righteousness dwells.

If there's one massive benefit the current upheaval in our country is showing it is that this world is not heaven. Now no one would admit that, but how many of us functionally think that this is as good as it gets!

But there is something better, where in Eden perfection was lost, in the cross the promise of a perfect world was restored. Why does Jesus tarry to come back: **John 14:1-3**.

What awaits us in this time is a world we cannot imagine. A world where there is full restoration between God and man, between man and nature, and between us and others. Wonderful, astounding perfection!

And why is it so perfect? Righteousness is there. Righteousness is a word robed in religiosity, but it means perfection, total lack of wrongness, stunning purity. Where is this righteousness? It is God himself. We will be restored to a world where we will be satisfied not by things which are created but by the creator himself. We will enjoy to the fullest not things which are fragile but that which is immensely infinite!

In other words, one day you will have a world with no racial-tension, no violent protests, no cancer, no birth-defects and no pain, and yet what will ultimately capture our hearts most is the righteousness of God himself. If, Peter's logic goes, that will satisfy us for all eternity, why then would you not want to live holy and godly lives as an expression of that very righteousness in this world.

By weighting the question in such a cosmic way he now transitions to his first answer: **2 Peter 3:14-16**.

Here we see our second point: **The Diligence of Holiness**.

In light of all Peter has said, we should be diligent in regards to holiness and godly conduct.

In 2 Peter 2:13, Peter calls the false teachers "blots and blemishes," but here believers are to be diligent to be found without blot or blemish and at peace in this final day of judgment. Again Peter prevents us from having to low a view of our own holiness.

I watched, as many of you did, the Michael Jordan documentary that came out a few months ago. I was amazed at the episode that keyed on Dennis Rodman, the token roll player on the team.

Now when it comes to holiness, Dennis Rodman might not be the best example, but when it comes to diligence he was astounding. Rodman had an uncanny knack for getting rebounds but this documentary showed that this wasn't accidental. He would watch film of his teammates shooting from various spots on the floor and he would track where the ball would generally go if Jordan missed when shooting a

three on the right side, or when Pippen shot from the top of the key. He diligently took in all this information so that when a teammate shot the ball, from a certain spot on the floor, he would already know where to go to grab the rebound in the event they missed. It was an incredibly dedicated scheme.

Peter here is calling for such diligence towards holiness. Do you scheme out your godly conduct? Do you take notes at home on a Tuesday evening focusing on how you might better encourage your roommates or love your spouse?

But this is also where we see the wonderful truth of the gospel which distances itself from works based salvation. The word "to be found" is a legal word. It's the word a judge would use to find a defendant guilty or innocent.

So when he applies this to the church it should be understood not that we ourselves are capable of being sinless, but instead that we might make every effort by our actions and by our hearts to be found by the judge to be sinless and at peace. What an astounding claim. That we might before a judge not only be found innocent, but that we would have relational peace with the judge who declares us clean.

But how is this possible? We know we have sinned, each and every one of us. And like Lady Macbeth all of our diligent efforts will do nothing to wash the blood off of our hands.

But look at what Jesus does for his church: **Ephesians 5:25-27**. What does it mean to be diligent to be found without spot or blemish and at peace? It means that we make every effort in our life to be found in Christ Jesus.

Far from being simply a mental assent, this means that we seek to live as Christ lived. Remember what Peter says in **2 Peter 1:8-10**. Why do we seek to live out our holy lives? Because it reminds us of the work of Christ to purify us for good works, and it reminds us of the peace that Jesus brings us with God himself.

This sounds great. But what does it look like to be diligent in this way? Look at **2 Peter 3:15-16**.

I love how Peter says this. This verse was the most challenging to my own heart because it causes us to really think. Peter here is asking us to count, to consider, to actively engage our minds that every patient day between Jesus' first coming and second coming is for our very salvation.

Meaning no day on earth is a wasted day for the believer. Each day is an opportunity to see and confirm the reality of your salvation as you practice these things even when everything else seems so difficult. One of my greatest joys in marriage is waking up in the same bed as my wife. I remember the amazement when we first got married that I didn't have to wait until after work to see her, I didn't have to drive to her house, her she was already with me and I got to do everything that day with her. This is the attitude Peter wants believers to have. Each day we wake up here on this world, which is not perfect, we are afforded another day to be blown away by Jesus' love for us. Each day we are able to grow in holiness and godly conduct is a day where we are reminded of the power of Jesus' love the change us.

When you wake up in the morning, do you consider the opportunity you have to confirm your salvation by treasuring Jesus like this?

Peter alludes to Paul's writing at this point. Paul is another biblical author and Peter here affirms that some of his churches also received letters from Paul. Where most of Peter's letters focus on salvation as something ultimately in the future, Paul himself affirms this, but at times he also stresses the reality that believers are already saved.

In speaking of the work of Jesus look at what Paul says in **Romans 3:23-24**.

So here Paul says, yes you are justified. And it is true that as believers you are saved, but also that you are being saved. True believers endure. But just as people do today, people during Peter's day looked at Paul's writings selectively and said: If we are justified already, then we can live as we want for our own joy.

Peter says they do this to their own destruction. That word "destruction" is the word frequently used in the New Testament to indicate eternal punishment. It is not to fail at one thing, it is to be destroyed in hell by this thought. Why do we so often minimize God's call to live holy lives? Because we often think that in saying no to sin we are saying no to joy.

It makes me think of a Wiley the Coyote cartoon. After endlessly pursuing the Roadrunner, the finally cornered him in a tree. So he began to try and jump up and down on the branch in order to break it and capture the road runner. Eventually he successfully breaks the branch, but like a spring board he send the road runner up to the next branch, and the branch breaks under the Coyote and it is he who falls to his cartoon destruction.

You see, what is interesting is that in the earliest parts of church history, dangerous heresies were equated with complex doctrines like the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. But Peter here is showing how simple a heretical understanding of the gospel can be.

Here Peter says that the first heretics are not those who theoretically deny the Trinity, but those who confess Christ but believe there is greater hope in sin than in holiness. Yet in their desperate attempt to find joy and peace on their own, like the Coyote, they find themselves destroyed.

So what do we do knowing all of this? Here is our third point and Peter's second answer? **The Delight of Holiness**. Read with me **2 Peter 3:17-18**.

Now we know that there are few things more important to consider in life than the way in which Jesus saves us from sin and to live for holiness. And that even though each day provides new temptations, each day is an opportunity to trust that obeying Jesus is of greater joy than choosing sin.

So how do you live? We actively look out for what is dangerous by growing in what is satisfying.

The first thing we do is that we take care that we do not believe and act according to these false teachers. The word used by Peter is a military word. It's a sentinel, one who keeps watch. We have a Mount Sentinel in Missoula which stands at the mouth of Hellgate Canyon where the Native Americans would often ambush the wagon trains coming into the valley.

The mountain stood as an ever present reminder to keep watch, to look out, to be on guard.

What are we on guard for? For places in our lives, people in our lives, and priorities in our lives which tend to downplay our conversion by making holiness optional at best and joyless at worst. To believe this, Peter says is to be carried away, as if caught up by a river. And the result is that you "lose your stability."

Remember what Peter said false teachers do? **2 Peter 2:14**. To listen to such lies is to show your lack of stability. And the word implies that you lose by falling. It is to fall from a position of life like a petal falls from a flower. The world will try to convince you that God's commands to live for his glory is a dubious decision at best. That instead to prioritize the present is the key to upward mobility for joy, but it is in all reality to fall from what provides life.

Instead, contrary to falling, contrary to the instability, believers are commanded to grow. How are you to make sure you are not carried away? Grow so big that no current can move you: **2 Peter 3:18**.

At this point Peter has defined some key things in his letter. He has reminded believers of doctrine of conversion and the inspiration of scripture in chapter one. He has outlined the dangers of fleeting promise of false teachers in chapter 2. He doubled down on the doctrine of judgment and salvation in chapter 3, and here he reminds us of the hope of a New Heavens and New Earth and the peace that comes through Jesus Christ. In light of all of this how are we to live?

We are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

Contrary to what falls, we are to grow in size, we are to increase, become larger, more solid, more robust in what? In the experience of grace.

He's not telling us to grow in our ability to be gracious to others. He calling, he is using an imperative, to command you as a Christian to grow in your experience of God's grace for you.

Peter desires for you to not be stuck in the mediocrity of worship but instead to grow in amazement at the grace which saves you! How do you do this? Through the knowledge of Jesus and his radiant enduring glory.

This is how Peter ended his letter, but also how he began it: **2 Peter 1:2**.

We must grow in our ability to know Jesus. Knowing Jesus is the most practical means of Christian growth and conduct according to Peter. Knowing Jesus brings us peace in chaos. Knowing Jesus gives us stability in an unstable world. Knowing Jesus reminds us of the purity his death gives us. Knowing Jesus makes us yearn to be with him in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Ultimately the opinion which shapes everything in your life is your opinion of Jesus.

If you really want to know Jesus in a way which satisfies the book of 2 Peter gives three primary ways you can do that in closing.

First, you know Jesus primarily through conversion. That is by repenting of your sins and putting faith in the gospel: the good news that Jesus did everything required to save sinners and restore us to God. This is what Peter focuses on in the first four verses of this book. It is primarily in your conversion that you see Jesus' beauty, his love, his mercy and his affection for you.

If you want your life to be changed, it cannot be changed apart from being saved by Jesus.

Second, you know Jesus by seeing him as the central and primary truth of all scripture. In the end of chapter one and the beginning of chapter 2 Peter calls us to see Jesus as the fulfillment of scripture so that we can joyfully desire to obey all of scripture. If you've never read your Bible, or struggle to do so, join our Bible reading group on Wednesdays and start there.

And that leads into the last place you can grow in your knowledge of Jesus, be part of a faithful church. Peter here spends the majority of this book warning people of false brothers and sisters in Christ who want to lead them away from pursuing Jesus, so by contrast we should seek to be a church, and participate as a church, in helping each other follow Jesus.

Sovereign Hope should be a place where you come and see the grace the knowledge of Jesus brings. That's not to say all of our members will show how easy it is to know Jesus, but instead how satisfying it is to follow Jesus even when it's hard.