

Prayer

We love You, Lord, because You have loved us with true faithfulness and compassion. Give us the grace to demonstrate our love through the worship we offer today, and through our daily service of others, in our homes, at our work and wherever we meet with others in the coming week. All praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The food we eat

We shall pray this coming week about a number of issues to do with the food we eat each day. The truth is that it keeps us alive, but it does a far more than that. It reflects our social values, it is an important focus of family life, and the things we eat affect us directly in significant ways. Because of this, ask the Lord in prayer to help you to be discerning about the food that you eat.

Meditation

The life of faith is not always clear, and we may not know what to do;
We face new challenges each day; and we must decide

when we should speak out the truth, for the sake of the Gospel;
or be silent and allow the Gospel to speak for itself.

when we should act and do the work of the Kingdom;
or stand aside and let others take the strain.

when we should think carefully and study the Word of the Lord;
or act on impulse because the spirit bids us on.

when we should confer with others so that God's people can agree;
or act alone for the call is to us, and us alone.

when we should challenge what is happening around us in God's name;
or encourage others to find God's truth for themselves.

So ask for the gift of discernment, that important spiritual gift,
Too often forgotten, but needed by us all for the work of the Kingdom.

Bible Study - 2 Peter 3:1-7

¹ My dear friends, this is the second letter I have now written to you. In them both, I am trying to stir your honest thinking by reminding you ² that you should remember the words of warning spoken by the holy prophets, and the command of the Lord and Saviour passed on by your apostles. ³ First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, making mischief and indulging their own interests ⁴ and saying, 'Where is the "coming" He promised? For ever since our ancestors died, everything continues just as it was since the beginning of creation!' ⁵ They deliberately ignore this fact, that long ago the heavens were made by God's Word and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, ⁶ through which the world of that time was deluged with water and destroyed. ⁷ But by the same Word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the godless.

Bible Study

If you have followed the previous studies in 2 Peter over recent weekends, than you will be relieved that in chapter 3 Peter steps back from his forthright condemnation of the false prophets who have disturbed the peace of the church and threatened its teaching. In this last part of his letter, he does not withdraw his condemnation, but offers the church a last warning about these people, and highlights two essential areas of the Gospel that have been attacked and are in danger of been misrepresented because of false teaching. They are the coming again of our Lord Jesus (3:4) and the authority in Creation of God the Father (3:5-7). Peter's words of warning are often quoted today; 'in the last days, scoffers will come ...' and they

remain an important reminder to us that we should be on our guard against teaching which distorts the Gospel, particularly in these two important matters.

Firstly, scoffers ridicule the idea that Jesus will come again. This is true now; for it is likely that you will know others in the church who doubt whether the Lord will return again in glory, or they believe that this is merely an old myth which has a lesson for us, but is not an event that will happen. Indeed, you may have heard the same argument that Peter quotes in verse 4, which is that everything has always been the same and will continue the same, so why speculate on the 'end of time'. It is quite clear from what Peter says that he insists that this is part of the Gospel, and the second part of what he has to say boldly explains why.

Peter insists that the Gospel of salvation is set within God's span of history, which has a beginning and an end, and the idea that everything has always been the same is not true. Within his own lifetime, he had seen history changed because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, but Peter argues his case as from the divine authority of God. Surely, he says, the God who made the world and everything in it, is the one who knows both its beginning and its end (3:5,7). It may not be immediately obvious, but when Peter talks of the forming of the world 'out of water and by means of water' (3:5), he talks of two creations. After the original creation of the world (Gen 1,2), God later destroyed what he had created because of the wickedness of people, by means of the Flood (Gen 6), out of which Noah was saved. At the time of the Flood, the world was remade, underneath the water, and this is what Peter talks about when he says in verse 6 'through which the world of that day was deluged with water and destroyed'. If you read Genesis, you will discover that this 're-creation' is very significant because it is the one out of which salvation comes. Noah and his son Seth were the forefathers whose generations produced the great man Abraham, and subsequently the whole history of salvation as recorded in the Old Testament. Also, God made a promise after the flood that he would not destroy the world again because of sin, but in due course He revealed through the prophets that all sin would be destroyed at the end of time, on the 'day of the Lord' (e.g. Isaiah 22:12f. Jer 46:10f., Amos 5:18f. etc.). This is why Peter talks of the world as being maintained only until God brings everything to its proper end at the second coming of Jesus; the earth is 'reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgement ...' (3:7).

God's salvation plan encompasses all history, says Peter, and those who doubt the 'coming' of the Lord Jesus in glory at the end of time, doubt the authority of God over His Creation. In his eyes, such false teaching should not be allowed near the church nor the people of God. He was right then, and he is right now.

Space for notes

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss the different attitudes you have found in the church about the second coming of Jesus and the end of time.
2. Are we right to dismiss those who say that Jesus will not come again from preaching in our churches?
3. How important is our understanding of the Flood to the saving purposes of God throughout creation?

Discipleship

All of us have a duty to be vigilant about the teaching of the Gospel, but it is difficult for us to be direct about it unless Scripture itself says categorically that some teaching is right or wrong. There is no doubt about what Peter says is true teaching, and what is false. The question remains, what should we do to deal with false teaching if it arises? I suggest that when it does, we properly and politely draw a preacher's attention to this Scripture. Each church must then make its decisions about whether preachers acceptably preach the Gospel for them.

Prayer

Lord God, make us wise in our judgements and loving in our actions, ever conscious of the presence of Your guiding Holy Spirit and the judgement of Almighty God which rests upon us as well as all people. Save through Jesus Christ, and bring us into His glory, we pray; AMEN