

Heart of the Lesson

Jesus said that when He returns, conditions will be as in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37). Peter said the last days will give rise to scoffers against the Christian faith who will mock the thought of Christ's return (II Pet. 3:3-4). As we look at societal conditions today, are they not like the days of Noah? And is Christianity not under attack? It would be easy to despair, but the righteous should not give up, for help is on the way.

1. The convening of God's court (Dan. 7:9-12). In visions from God, Daniel saw the span of world history, from the then-current world power, Babylon, to the end of the age, when God will judge the world and bring in righteousness. Even a casual reading of the description of God's end-time judgment hall—with the sights, sounds, and myriad attendant servants—should capture the attention of the reader.

The solemn severity of the occasion is highlighted when the text says, "And the books were opened" (Dan. 7:10). Though the context is the judging of world powers, God keeps books on individuals as well (cf. Rev. 20:12-13).

The unbeliever should fear the judgments depicted in these scenes, for the Bible is clear that only those committed to Christ have their sins forgiven and need not fear future judgment. The believer in Christ actually looks forward to that future day when Christ comes in power and great glory.

2. The coming of God's Christ (Dan. 7:13). The atmosphere in the throne room of God is quite different when Daniel sees in his vision the Son of Man, Christ Jesus Himself, brought before the Ancient of Days. It is a scene unlike the earlier one in that here there

is anticipation of something good about to happen. Man came before God for condemnation; Jesus comes before God for coronation.

When the hero of a story arrives on the scene, there can be a lump in the throat, tears in the eyes, and utter joy within the hearts of those who look forward to evil being conquered and righteousness installed where it had not been. So shall it be when God does away with evil and fulfills the promise given to those who in repentance have come to Jesus for salvation.

3. The coronation of God's King (Dan. 7:14). God has given human rulers the opportunity to make laws and rule nations with justice and righteousness, but the story of human history is not a pleasant one. Thousands of years and an even greater number of rulers have shown quite convincingly that sinners cannot do what is right and bring about lasting peace upon the earth.

In his vision, Daniel saw God, having taken away human governments, installing His King over a kingdom that will promote life as it ought to be on this earth. It will be a worldwide kingdom with Christ in complete control and being served by those of all nations. Dominion and glory will be His—and deservedly so.

If you know Christ as your Saviour and Lord, does your heart not rejoice in this vision of Daniel? It should, for the events described here will come to pass because God's Word is true. You will be there to behold the King in all His glory and to serve Him forever and ever.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

—Darrell W. McKay.

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If God were to inform a believer that Christ's coming was tomorrow, that person might well assess his own spiritual condition—as well as that of his family, his church, or his nation—and conclude that he and others were not as prepared for the event as they should be. So it was with Daniel.

After reading that portion of Jeremiah's prophecy that dealt with the time frame for God to visit His people and end their exile, Daniel knew that neither he nor his countrymen were spiritually prepared. He determined to do something about it.

1. The concern (Dan. 9:4). Daniel was so concerned about the spiritual deficit among the captive Israelites that it drove him to his knees in prayer. He could have—and perhaps did, though it is not recorded—reached out to as many of his countrymen in exile as possible to note God's timetable for release and urged their repentance. What we do know for sure is that he chose to do something much more powerful and necessary, and that was to pray. It may well be that he also felt his own spiritual poverty and believed he had to make things right with God.

How does the promised return of Christ affect those in the body of Christ? Though we are not given a precise timetable for His return, should we not sense our own need for a clean heart before God and approach Him in prayer? Should we not be praying for the church as a whole as well as for unbelievers as the time draws near? He is coming again, and many are not ready.

2. The confession (Dan. 9:5-10). In addition to extolling the virtues of a holy God, Daniel confessed the lack of virtue, faith, and obedience among his

fellow Jews. Not only that—and this should be noted by all—Daniel identified with sinful Israel and included himself in his confession. He did not say "Israel" had sinned, but "we" have sinned. It was not "they" and "them" but "we" and "us."

How do we pray when we pray for our family, our church, or our nation? If we were honest with ourselves and with God, we would pray as Daniel did, including ourselves when confessing sin before God. We may have Christ's righteousness on our account, but none of us has His perfect righteousness in daily practice. May God have mercy not only on others but on us as well.

3. The consequences (Dan. 9:11-14). The Jewish nation, both people and land, was under the curse of God because God's law had been willingly violated. Despite prior warnings by God that He would remove the people from the land if they disobeyed, they chose to transgress the law and do as they pleased. In God's timing, He sent an enemy upon them to remove them from the land in punishment and thus to awaken them to their true spiritual condition. Sin has its consequences.

How dark the heart can become at times so that even the child of God begins to think he can depart from the plain Word of God without God taking notice! True, believers are subject to the wiles of the devil and the temptation to sin, but their track record in resisting evil should be improving as time goes by. May God have mercy on His children and grant them inner strength. The fruition of the kingdom of God is fast approaching. It is time to prepare our hearts.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

The events of the last lesson in this first unit of the quarter were prophetic for Daniel yet are historic for us. However, they do foreshadow a yet future personage (the antichrist) and events surrounding his reign of terror. Since the events are primarily historic to us, that is what will be emphasized as we learn the lesson of God's ultimate victory over evil.

1. The indignation (Dan. 8:19).

The Angel Gabriel was sent to Daniel to explain the vision he had seen. Mainly the vision involved the end of a time called the "indignation." The Hebrew word describes intense anger and in Scripture is more often used of God than of man. It expresses anger and rage to the highest degree. In this instance, it is God's estimation of the times that would result in the arrival of a very evil and blasphemous king.

This leads us to the question of allowing or not allowing God to be God in our lives. Is God installed on the throne of our heart, or is He set on the shelf to be called upon when needed? He wants us to recognize our continual need for Him and to yield to His Spirit in the everyday issues of our lives.

2. Its duration (Dan. 8:20-22).

Daniel was told that the animals he saw in his vision (vss. 3-12) represented the Medo-Persian kingdom, followed by Greece. The horns of the beasts represented the kings of these empires. The first king of Greece (Alexander) would be followed by four others, since his kingdom would be broken into four parts. None of the kingdoms would be God-honoring, and the four would be less powerful than the one they succeeded.

As we look at world history, do we

not see that political entities come and go, some being powerful while others are weak? How many of these earthly kingdoms have given God His due? How many promote righteousness and godly living? Regardless of how good or how bad we may think our own nation is doing in this regard, do our hearts long for the coming full manifestation of the kingdom of Christ? Let us live righteously while we await the arrival of this great future.

3. Its culmination (Dan. 8:23-26).

Toward the end of the indignation there would arise a king with great power. He would prosper and destroy and do all kinds of evil. He would exalt himself and be very much anti-God. He would be allowed to live and rule only so long; then he would lose his life. This ruler, scholars affirm, was a Seleucid king by the name of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was a forerunner of the antichrist of the coming time of Great Tribulation. Both the indignation and the evil king are but prototypes of end-time conditions.

By all this we are reminded that God will allow evil to continue only so long on this earth before He puts a stop to all the unbridled madness. His Chosen One will rule in full glory over a kingdom like no other. Praise God for His revelation of future events, both near and far from the time of their happening, so that God's people can know that He is in ultimate control.

Apart from the prophetic Word of God, it would be easy to forget that God is in control and that things will improve one day. That knowledge should motivate us to holy living and to be more evangelistic in our day-to-day lives.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

It is wholly appropriate that at this time of year we turn our minds to the hope Christ's resurrection brings. A major component of a life lived for Christ is service. That is true both here and now and in the coming kingdom. The object of our service is twofold; we are to serve Christ, and we are to serve others. This week's lesson points us in that direction.

1. The example of Jesus (Luke 22:14-20). Luke recounts the great joy Jesus had on the occasion of His eating the Passover meal with the twelve apostles. Despite the approaching agony in Gethsemane, our Lord was genuinely elated to have this opportunity to strengthen the bond between Himself and His disciples, as well as to strengthen their bond with each other.

The Passover meal was a family meal (cf. Exod. 12:3), and Jesus' assembling His disciples for the repast underscored His earlier teaching that His family was not based on blood but on obedience (cf. Luke 8:21). That being the case, it was His humble privilege to serve them, His brothers.

As we point out the example of Jesus' service, it is not to say that we look to Him for that and nothing more; but we do profit by what He did and how He did it. With that in mind—and since believers are part of the family of God—how much joy should we have when doing something for our brothers and sisters in Christ? There is joy to be had in lending a hand, saying a kind word, sharing a meal, or giving a cup of cold water to others.

2. The warning of Jesus (Luke 22:21-23). During this last meal with His disciples until the coming kingdom,

Jesus revealed that there was a betrayer in their midst. The reference obviously was to Judas, though none of the eleven others even suspected such a thing.

Judas is an example of those who place self above all else and serve themselves first. Even being with Jesus and the other disciples for a long time had had no inward impact on his life. Money was his god.

This should be a stark warning that a professing believer needs to be more than professing. An inner change, a new birth that signals resurrection hope, needs to be present if we are to put others, and especially Jesus, first.

3. The lecture of Jesus (Luke 22:24-30). The disciples then began to argue, as they had before (cf. Mark 9:33-34), about who would hold the highest positions in the coming kingdom. Judas certainly had his faults, but so did the other disciples, albeit of a different nature. So yet again Jesus had to speak pointedly to them about what constitutes greatness in the kingdom of God. Unlike Judas, they would certainly be in the kingdom and have responsibilities, but attitudes needed to change.

It is very easy for our minds to be sidetracked into allowing ambitions of the sinful flesh to surface. This is why we need to take stock regularly of where we are and what we are doing. Being constantly in the Word of God, and especially in the Gospels and other New Testament books, allows the Spirit of God to nudge us—even lecture us—in the right direction. Keeping in mind our hope in the resurrection provides proper balance to life.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, there is an inscription over the gate of hell that reads "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here." Despite the errors in the overall theology of this epic poem, the warning of the inscription is accurate. In hell there is no hope. In writing to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul said that apart from Christ there is "no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13).

Of course, many people have hope, but hope is only as good as the basis for it. It is Christ who gives true hope—hope one can count on. Hope based on mere wishes is useless. This week we look at those whose hope had been dashed when Jesus died and how that hope was restored upon His resurrection.

1. Hope buried (Luke 24:13-21). Our lesson recounts the experience of two of Jesus' disciples other than the Twelve. They, like all the disciples, had hoped—indeed, believed—that Jesus was the Christ sent from God. His crucifixion had decimated their hopes and dreams. In great heaviness of heart, they were walking the seven or so miles home from Jerusalem. They walked not in silence but in animated conversation, trying to make sense of what had happened.

The brokenhearted disciples were soon overtaken by another traveler. Not recognizing Him as the risen Lord Jesus, they unburdened their hearts and bared their dashed hopes. Obviously, their original hope was based on truth, but because they did not correctly understand what had to take place, they only mourned the death of Jesus.

Believers in Jesus can and do lose hope at times. A prayer that goes unanswered, a tragedy that unfolds, an economic hardship, and many other things can deflate one's expectations. Though cloudy days hide the sun, the sun has not gone away; it will shine

again when the clouds dissipate. It is always too soon to quit.

2. Hope resurrected (Luke 24:28-32). Insisting that their fellow traveler join them for food and lodging was an act of concern and kindness that proved instrumental in the rekindling of the disciples' hope. At the table, Jesus assumed the role of host and in the breaking of bread opened their eyes to see who He really was.

His aim accomplished, Jesus disappeared, leaving His two followers with renewed hope and joy. As they reviewed the experience, they admitted that as He had spoken to them on the way, the embers of their dying hope had been fanned; and now, of course, they burned brightly.

Does not God do the same with all who are burdened and downtrodden? Does He not in some way enter our lives to open our eyes and give us hope again? From personal experience, I can state that blessing and renewed hope often are revived in the process of helping others. Try it; it works!

3. Hope restored (Luke 24:33-35). The good news of Christ's resurrection was too good not to share with others. Even though it was night and most likely dangerous to walk seven miles anywhere, it was daytime in the hearts of these two as they went as fast as possible to tell the Eleven.

As stated earlier, hope is only as good as the basis for it. For the believer, hope is based on the Word of God. Yes, we can have misunderstandings at times and even forget what the Word says; yet the promise of the resurrection is plain for all to see. As Christ has been raised, so too will all who are in Christ.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

Promises! Promises! Everybody makes them, from children wanting parental permission to politicians wanting votes. Everyone makes them, but not everyone keeps them. We have all had feelings hurt or been otherwise disappointed when someone broke a promise to us. Is there anybody who actually keeps all his promises? Of course the answer is yes, and that Person is Jesus.

1. The promise of resurrection (Luke 24:36a). The very fact that Jesus appeared bodily in the midst of an assembly of His disciples was proof positive that He was not dead. No longer was His body lying lifeless in a dark tomb, for He was standing before them and speaking to them. Jesus had foretold it (cf. Luke 9:22), and it had come to pass.

Every religious leader throughout history has died, but only one has been resurrected. Sadly, many sincere people have chosen to follow dead leaders. The good news we share with others is the news of Christ's resurrection. In fact, the resurrection is the very heart of the gospel, for apart from the resurrection we have no good news and no hope. There is but one gospel, and it is the story of Christ.

2. The promise of peace (Luke 24:36b-43). Our Lord's first word to His startled disciples was "peace." Peace with God and peace with one's fellow man are impossible apart from Christ, but God-given peace was promised in Luke 2:14 by the angels of the Lord in their birth announcement of Christ.

Believers in Christ are no longer enemies of God but are now friends, even family. We continually see lives changed because of Christ and His resurrection power: where there was

strife, there is now peace; racist attitudes disappear; and broken family ties are mended. All of this is a foretaste of God's coming kingdom, wherein peace will reign because the Prince of Peace will be in charge. All who trust in Christ share in this hope based on God's promise.

3. The promise of understanding (Luke 24:44-48). Jesus repeated His previous teaching regarding the Old Testament promises about Himself and opened the minds of the disciples to understand. This began the fulfillment of His words found elsewhere. John 12:16 tells us that once Jesus was glorified, His disciples would remember and understand what had not been plain earlier. Jesus told them that understanding would come later (13:7).

At this point in Luke, Jesus had not yet been fully glorified by ascending to heaven; yet the time was near, and so the promise of understanding the gospel was coming to pass. All disciples, both then and today, have the mission of taking this news to the ends of the earth.

4. A promise renewed (Luke 24:49-53). The promise of power from "on high" was reiterated by Christ. The disciples would learn shortly that the "power" was the Spirit of God. They would also learn that this power would not only change them but also work in and through them to change countless others.

The power of the Spirit is present in all believers today. So let us live confidently, as those who are fully trusting Christ as we await the fulfillment of all His promises. He has made promises, and He will keep them.

—Darrell W. McKay.

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We sometimes hear or read about something being a pivotal event. Such an event might be described as changing the course of history in the life of a nation or, closer to home, changing the course of one's own life. A Christian is one whose life has been changed by Christ, and that certainly would qualify as pivotal!

The event described in this week's lesson might not be taken seriously by the world at large. But when properly understood, it is seen to be a turning point of pivotal proportions for the world.

1. A new day (Acts 2:1). Pentecost had been a Jewish holiday since the time of the Exodus, but few outside Israel paid it any mind. This, however, was a new day. Pentecost would be so transformed that it would become known as the birthday of the church. Little did the disciples of Jesus who met together that day realize how their lives would be changed.

As many of us look back over the time we have known Christ, we marvel at what has taken place. The adventure that began at conversion continues and will take us into eternity. What a new and pivotal day our personal Pentecost was!

2. A new speech (Acts 2:2-4). Suddenly, with unearthly phenomena both audible and visual, the gathered assembly of disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. Each began speaking in a different language.

As the Jerusalem disciples had new speech when the Spirit came upon them, so, upon coming to Christ, blasphemers and otherwise profane people abandon swearing and other vile speech, replacing such with words of grace. A new and different vocabulary is further proof of the presence of God

in the life of a believer.

3. A new power (Acts 2:5-13). The sound like the rushing wind (vs. 2) was heard beyond the gathering place so that people were attracted to where the disciples were. The feast of Pentecost brought religious Jews and proselytes from much of the Roman empire to Jerusalem. Luke pointedly mentioned where they were from, underlining the presence of many different languages.

One of the amazing and miraculous aspects of Pentecost was that the Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in languages foreign to them so that the gospel of Christ could be heard and carried to many places. The words "language" (Acts 2:6) and "tongue" (vs. 8) translate the same Greek word, a word from which we get our word "dialect." The words they spoke were actual languages they had not learned. This was made possible only by the power of God (cf. vs. 4).

What should we take away from all this? First, God wants the good news about Jesus to be heard by all people groups, and He began the process Himself on Pentecost. Today the work of ministering to previously unreached peoples includes the deciphering of languages and resultant Scripture translation.

Second, not everyone is gifted or called by God to go to different cultures and peoples, but we can speak to those of our own language group as the door is opened to us.

Finally, as the disciples on Pentecost were thought to be drunk, so today's disciples are often considered strange. Forgetting what others may think, in these "last days" let us utilize the power of the Holy Spirit and proclaim God's truth.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

Living in a fallen world as we do, we encounter numerous things that can sap our spiritual vitality and hope if we are not careful. Since we also have a supernatural enemy out to either derail our testimony for Christ or weaken our spiritual influence, there is all the more reason to do what is necessary to keep hope alive.

1. A reason for hope (I Thess. 4:13-17). Some believers in Thessalonica had died since the Apostle Paul had visited and preached to them, and their loved ones were troubled as they tried to sort out the times in light of the prophetic word they had heard from him. In short, sorrow prevailed, and hope wavered.

Paul therefore sought to clarify his earlier teaching in an effort to rekindle the believers' faith and hope. His effort to meet their needs has resulted in a passage that countless believers cling to in the worst of times. Christ will return in the clouds to take to Himself both those who have died in Him and believers living at the time. This event we call the rapture will begin a never-ending presence of the Lord with His own.

God, who cannot lie, has promised that He will return for all who trust Him. Neither the intervening centuries nor death itself can alter that promise. Regardless of your present circumstances, do not give up or tire of looking up. One fine day the call will come or the shout will be heard. As the hymn says, "It will be worth it all when we see Jesus" (Rusthoy, "When We See Christ").

2. A ministry of hope (I Thess. 4:18). The bewildered and grieving believers in Thessalonica were not to give in to their fears. Rather, they were to take the words of Paul and comfort one

another.

As the physical body of a person has ways of contributing to the well-being of the parts that are weaker, so the members of the body of Christ are to do what they can to strengthen other members. Who in your circle of Christian acquaintances could use an encouraging word today? Are there any whose hope in Christ is waning or who despair of the difficulties life has thrown at them? If you can think of any, that may well be your ministry of hope for today.

3. A life lived in hope (I Thess. 5:1-11). Paul tried to redirect the outlook of his readers from confusion regarding prophetic events to living for Christ while patiently waiting for Him. They were to live watchfully, wearing the armor God supplies, which includes hope. Hope based on God's promise is hope based on a sure thing.

Because true believers in Christ have the promises of God, including the sure return of Christ for them, they should not get so distracted by circumstances that they fail to live faithfully and confidently. Prophecy is important, but we can get so involved in trying to determine something God has kept to Himself that we neglect more urgent matters, such as serving Christ and ministering to others.

May God help us to remember the basis for our hope as believers and to use that very hope to lift up fellow pilgrims on the way—those whose spiritual knees may be buckling under life's heavy load. Let us help one another keep hope alive.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

Often among new Christians, though not confined to them, we find an unquestioning embrace of whatever supposed Christian teachers espouse as biblical truth. Whether because they do not yet have a depth of understanding, or for other reasons, they can be easily diverted to a path different from that which is orthodox.

In this week's lesson, we are told that the Thessalonian believers, still new in the faith, encountered incorrect doctrine. They were having trouble sorting out the good from the bad.

1. Hope will be tested (II Thess. 2:1-3). The Thessalonian believers were already in something of a quandary as to the timing of the Day of Christ. They apparently had had one or more reports, purportedly from Paul, that it had come; yet these reports did not seem to agree with what Paul had taught them earlier. They could not rationally make sense of it, and they were troubled about it.

Paul reminded his readers of two events that had to happen before the Day of Christ. If they did not keep these in mind, their hope might be severely shaken. One of those "must" things was a great apostasy, or rebellion against God. The second was the revealing of the son of perdition, also known as the antichrist.

It is probably safe to say that every Christian, whether new in the faith or a time-tested saint, has had his hope assailed when going through situations that are less than pleasant. "Why, God? Are You still there, God?" are questions that expose a hope under stress. We must remember that hope, like faith, will be tested.

2. Truth will be unwanted (II Thess. 2:9-12). The antichrist will be empowered supernaturally and

with great deceit will gather to himself those who hate the truth and love the lie. Sadly, those who embrace the lie will be confirmed in that condition; they will love unrighteousness more than God's truth.

Do we not see in our own day God's truth being rejected more and more, to the extent that any Christian symbol or mention of God or the things of God is banned from classrooms, courthouses, and the public square? Do we not see acts of sin being more widely accepted and even taught as part of some public school curriculums? Current societal trends could be seen as preparing the way for end-time events.

3. Stand fast in truth and hope (II Thess. 2:13-17). Though the Thessalonian believers were having difficulty processing what they were hearing from others in relation to what Paul had taught earlier, Paul still had great confidence that they would not jettison their hope for some other teaching. He was sure of their salvation and urged them to stand fast in what they had been taught by him, for therein lay their hope. He then committed them to God.

There are many winds of false doctrine blowing across the contemporary landscape and, sadly, gaining a following. Too many are remaking God in their own image and thus sanctioning their own sin and rejecting God's truth. They want to determine truth by their own authority, but apart from coming to Christ they will perish.

May God help all who know and love the truth to stand fast in these last days, even as hope is tested again and again.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

Though the overall theme of our study this quarter is “Beyond the Present Time” and lessons in the first two units have focused on the coming kingdom and our great resurrection hope, our final unit will bring us back to the present time. That is only fitting, since the prophetic word and the promises of God are meant to have an impact on how we live while waiting for the future to unfold.

1. Born again to a living hope (I Pet. 1:3-4). Scripture is clear that one birth is insufficient to get anyone to glory. There must be a second birth, even as Jesus reminded Nicodemus in John 3. For those who have experienced that second birth, it is the cause of great praise to the One responsible. That God had mercy on us, sinners though we are, is reason enough to not only continually praise God but to live holy lives as well.

When we think through what the Lord has done for His own—a new life, an inheritance that will neither deteriorate nor disappear and is waiting for us—how can anyone cease to be thankful and worshipful in daily living? We should always be mindful of where we would still be spiritually if not for the grace and mercy of God.

Peter wrote these things to a people persecuted for their faith in Christ. He encouraged them not to forget who they were and whose they were and what they had in Christ. Christ was responsible for their hope because He had been raised from the dead and was very much alive. A Christian’s life is to be characterized by the sure and living hope he has in Christ.

2. Kept in that living hope (I Pet. 1:5-9). Believers are kept by the power of God through faith. Just as God is responsible for the new birth, so He

also knows that we need His keeping power if we are to live out our earthly lives and successfully attain the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

May it be true of each of us, regardless of our present and often trying circumstances, that our love remain steadfast and enduring. Let us be ever thankful to God for His keeping power on our behalf.

3. The mystery of the living hope (I Pet. 1:10-12). Peter told his readers that what they had in Christ was something the Old Testament prophets prophesied but never fully understood. It was a matter that the Spirit of God revealed *through* them but not *to* them. They did realize it did not pertain to them fully at that time, but it would to others who would follow. They were thus curious about the grace of God they had written about; it became a matter of great interest for them, as well as for the angels.

How much do we study what has happened to us? How well do we know and how well can we explain to others the new birth, the work of Christ, the future for believers, and the pattern for living that God wants to see in us? To be sure there will always be mysteries, for we live by faith. But a lack of perfect knowledge and understanding should not prevent us from continuing serious study.

Christians are those who have been born anew from above to a living hope. Christ, who is our hope (cf. I Tim. 1:1), is alive, and because He lives, our lives can be energized by that same resurrection power. Let each of us depend on that power in the remaining days of our earthly lives.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

There is nothing God would like to see more in His children than a display of His divine nature. Since they have been reborn by Him and indwelt by His Spirit, it seems quite natural that there should be evidence of godliness in them. If there is not, it certainly is not the fault of God.

1. Godliness is possible (II Pet. 1:3-4). The Apostle Peter was explicitly clear in stating that Christians have been given the things that enable them to be godly. Through knowing the Lord and believing His precious promises, they can exhibit moral traits that reflect the divine nature. Believers in Christ no longer have to show the deficiencies of the old nature that characterized their past. They are new people with the ability to live new lives.

As a result, there is no need for people who truly know Christ to live as though they did not know Him. Christians are people God has created, called, and converted. The path they now tread should be 180 degrees different from their former way of life.

2. Diligence is necessary (II Pet. 1:5-11). The recipients of Peter's epistle were people of faith in that they knew the Lord. That was fundamental to their being able to develop godly behavior. God had given them what was necessary to do so, but at this point they needed to make the decision to pursue a deep relationship with the Lord.

To their faith they needed to add additional virtues, each one being built upon the previous one. After listing them, Peter said that only a spiritually blind person does not see their value, and for a second time he said his readers must be diligent to obtain them.

The decision must be made to begin the quest.

One often hears the phrase "a mile wide and an inch deep" when speaking of the shape of the Christian church in various places. In other words, many in those places have come to faith in Christ, but they remain largely untaught and are thus shallow in their understanding of the faith.

How would others define you or your church in this regard? How would you define yourself? When looking at Peter's list of virtues to add to one's faith, where would you place yourself? This can be a sobering exercise.

3. Reminders are helpful (II Pet. 1:12-14). Peter knew that Christians need reminders, for life has a way of diverting the attention in a multitude of directions so that one's focus can be lost. He made it his ministry in the closing period of his life to do what he could to keep his fellow believers on the track to godliness. This brings to mind the Lord's charge to him beside the Sea of Galilee, when He told him three times to "feed" His "sheep" (John 21:15-17).

The command to feed and tend the lambs of God (believers) was taken seriously by the apostle, and we can draw a lesson from this charge as well. Some are better soul-winners than others, while some are better able to nurture those new or young in the faith. Both kinds of people are needed in God's work, so let each of us who know the Lord seek to do as Peter did and fulfill the calling Jesus has given us with the gift He has given for that purpose.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

The fact that the recipients of Peter's epistle were being persecuted for their faith was no reason as far as he was concerned for not being Christlike in attitude and conduct. Christians, whether persecuted or not, are not to forget biblical truth, nor are they to forgo ministry to one another because of adverse circumstances.

1. Leave sin in the past (I Pet. 4:1-3). Since Christ had suffered for them, and though they were now suffering, Peter's readers were to be Christlike in daily living. The person saved from sin's eternal penalty should not continue in or revert to the lusts and lasciviousness of the past. Persecution should not be used as an excuse to do again the deeds expected of them by those they used to sin with regularly.

This is still God's will for us today as well. The believer is to leave sin in the past, even if doing so might bring on persecution as former friends turn on him. Adults experience peer pressure as much as teenagers do, and their response should be the same as the advice they give to young people: Do not give in.

2. Guard your present (I Pet. 4:4-7). The early Christians faced ridicule and were thought strange by the crowd they used to join in sinful practices. Peter reminded his readers that the unsaved who had turned on them would face the judgment of God. One day God will judge everyone, and that is why the gospel of Christ is to be proclaimed. We are to give the unsaved an opportunity to come to Christ.

With judgment sure and coming, believers were not to revert to their old ways but to devote themselves to sobriety and watchful prayer.

The prayer meeting, which for many

years was the spiritual strength of the church, has in many places disappeared, or nearly so. This does not mean that Christians no longer pray, but the church as well as individuals are the weaker for the lack of this time of corporate prayer. Weak Christians and a weak church cannot, and do not, put up much of a fight against sin. We are to leave sin in the past and guard our present with prayer.

3. Live looking to the future (I Pet. 4:8-11). For whatever amount of time Peter's readers had left, they were to devote themselves to serving others. They were to love others fervently, for in so doing they would be showing that they forgave the sins of others against them. Showing hospitality was also laid upon them, but they were to do this with joy, not with a "have to" attitude.

God has given spiritual gifts to each believer, and such gifts have a purpose—namely, to help others in their daily walk, whether they are suffering persecution or not. Such ministry brings glory to God.

So, leaving sinful lives behind and watching out for snares that could entrap us in sin again, we must determine to diligently practice love toward others. What a difference that would make in the lives of individuals and in the church as a whole!

Finally, let each of us use his Spirit-given gifts in loving and serving others. This will contribute to the benefit of others and to the whole body of Christ. If the body of Christ benefits, Christ Himself is glorified. In our self-centered world, we who name the name of Christ as Saviour and Lord are to show proof that He is indeed our Master.

—Darrell W. McKay.

Heart of the Lesson

A fitting close to our study on “Beyond the Present Time” is a lesson on the hope we have as believers in the coming of our Lord. Our hope is not something fabricated by troubled minds longing for an escape from the ills of this present world; rather, it is based on the very words of the One who loves us. Jesus cannot and did not lie about His return, or any other matter; hence, our hope remains in the promise of His coming.

1. Scoffing at the promise (II Pet. 3:3-6). Following a chapter on false teachers and God’s judgment on them, Peter reminded his audience of the need to remain firm in trusting Jesus, especially as the last days draw near. The “last days” will produce scoffers, but that does not mean they will not appear in the present day. The Day of Pentecost, for example, was in the “last days,” so there were to be scoffers even during the lifetime of Peter’s readers.

Those laughing at Christ’s promised coming did so out of willful ignorance. Their hope was that Jesus was a liar, and therefore they would not face judgment.

There are still those who make a conscious effort to put the thought of the Second Coming or future judgment out of their minds. They love their sin and want nothing more than to continue therein. However, with the evidence God has built into every person concerning His reality, it is hard to be an atheist!

2. Patiently waiting for the promise (II Pet. 3:7-9). Peter reminded the believers that God does not reckon time as humans do. So what some humans might consider lateness on Christ’s part is not that at all. It is simply more opportunity for gospel preaching and

salvation.

We live nearly two thousand years into the last days. Thus, the Second Coming is all the closer. So what should be our attitude toward His coming and toward the unsaved? Though many suffering believers would like Christ to come back today, patience is needed. Remembering that more can still be saved should help us wait patiently.

3. Living in light of the promise (II Pet. 3:10-15a). There is coming a conflagration that will destroy the heavens and the earth. God will then create a new heavens and earth characterized by righteousness. How, then, should believers live? That was Peter’s theme to his readers. His counsel for them was to live holy and peaceful lives.

How can believers live the way Peter counseled in a world where faith in Christ is the possession of only a minority of people? What can help today’s disciples be found “without spot, and blameless” (II Pet. 3:14)?

We surely must be saturated with God’s truth to the extent that there is no room for doubt in regard to Christ and the promises of God. We must not be ashamed to hold a minority opinion as to the Second Coming, judgment, the new heavens and earth, and the like. We must stand boldly in our faith, firmly rooted in the promises of God.

We must seek to serve fellow believers and also become evangelistically minded. There should be an increasing sense of urgency for Bible printing and distribution and looking for open doors to speak about Christ. Wait the Lord use us as we patiently wait for Him.

—Darrell W. McKay.