

Looking Forward



Bro. Ricky Cunningham

2nd Peter 3:14–18

In the spring of 1994, my dad and mom bought a new farm. It was a farm that Celisa had ridden her horse on for many years because it was owned by a man in this church who lived here in the summer, but he lived in Florida in the winter. He decided to sell the farm and Celisa talked my dad into buying it. He bought it and before the deed was signed to my dad and mom, Celisa and I had 10 acres on the corner and we had already started a foundation for a house. A man by the name of Herschel McKendree who lived outside of Hardin actually framed the house up for us. They finished framing it at the end of the summer, and that fall, Celisa and I worked on the upstairs. On October 31st of 1994, we moved into the upstairs of our house, then for the rest of the winter we would work on the downstairs, and by the spring of the next year, we were finished. Can I just say this? I don't know if you've ever had that experience before, but the spring, the summer, and the fall of 1994, Celisa and I lived looking forward. We still lived on Highway 1346, also known as Dexter Road, but because we were building a new home on 1204 Redbud Road, everything we did that spring, summer, and fall—I'm talking about literally everything—every decision we made was made in light of our new home.

That's what Peter is talking about this morning. He's going to end this second letter where he tells us that primarily this is a second letter to remind us of things he's already told us. He's going to ask us, he's going to challenge us, he's actually going to command us, to look forward—look forward to our new home on a new heaven and a new earth—and if we will, it changes how we live.

Scripture

"Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

I don't think there's anyone here who's been under the ministry of Hardin Baptist Church who does not know what we're supposed to do when we see that word, "therefore." So, let's stop and see what it's there for. It's connecting what Peter is getting ready to say to us with what he just said, so it's so important you remember what Peter's been telling us, he's getting ready to tell us something else that's based on that. This last paragraph of teaching is tied to the truth he's already taught, especially the truth in the paragraph before this one. Now notice, he doesn't just immediately launch into what he wants us to know, he first reminds us of who we are, "Therefore, beloved..." Wow, anytime I read that word, beloved, I can't help but remember that when God the Father would address His Son here on the earth. He literally spoke from Heaven and people heard Him call Jesus, not just my Son, He called Him my *beloved* Son. In Ephesians, when Paul's writing about the blessings of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and he talks about the blessings of salvation that we have,

and he calls Jesus again "the beloved." It means He's the loved one. He's the one who's experienced the intimate love of God. And now, Peter takes that same term that God the Father uses to talk about His Son Jesus and uses it to address us as His sons and His daughters. You get that, right? We are the loved ones of God. God Creator, God Redeemer so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. But we're not talking about an intellectual knowledge of, we're talking about an experience of the very love of God that put Jesus on that cross in our place and has brought us into our relationship with Him. We are the loved ones of God. If you are a loved one of God then this is to you, beloved. "Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these..."

Simon Kistemaker is one of my favorite Greek scholars, and in his translation of this verse "waiting for" is translated as 'looking forward to.' When you're waiting for something, you're not passive you're active. When you're waiting something that you're really, really excited about, you're not just waiting passively; you're looking forward to it becoming reality. Now, what are these things we are looking forward to? What's Peter been talking about? He's been talking about the day of the Lord—the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. He's coming as a thief in the night, but not because it's going to be a stealth operation. I saw a commercial on TV for something that was showing the return of Christ, and in the commercial all of a sudden people would just disappear and the other people would be looking around. That's not the way it's going to be. That day's not going to surprise you because we are not children of the night, we're children of the light; we're children of the day. When the Lord comes, the Bible says the heavens, all the heavenly bodies, are going to dissolve and everything on the earth is going to be exposed. He says we're waiting for the destruction of the present heavens and present world, and we're looking forward to new heaven and a new earth—Peter says, verse 13, "...where righteousness dwells." So what are we looking forward to as the beloved of God? We're looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells. That means that where we live right now is not a place of righteousness, it's a place of unrighteousness. You know that, right?

I'm going to take just a minute to tell you about my week living in a place of unrighteousness. Can I just say last Sunday morning when I worshiped with you I was so looking forward to last week? I only lacked 110 acres of corn finishing the harvest and a hundred acres of wheat being sown and I would be done so I was so excited. But because of unrighteousness, there had been a death in our church family. So since Kory preached, Celisa and I decided to leave the 10:40 service to go and celebrate the life of Kelly Paschall's mom (you know the curse brought death into the world, right?).

Then also because of the curse, we had had a church member who's been in the Nashville hospital for two weeks. So we decided after the funeral we would drive to Nashville, visit him in the hospital, and then eat at my favorite restaurant in Nashville. We get through Clarksville, Celisa's driving, and all of a sudden we hear...*thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, hum, hum, hum, hum, hum, thump*. She said, "What's wrong with your truck?" I looked in my mirror and saw a flat tire, and I had just put brand new tires on the truck three weeks ago! I'm now on the side of the road between Clarksville and Nashville, and I'm going to change a tire with semis running 80 to 85 miles an hour and the cars passing the semis running 90 miles an hour. There was never a break! Everything that you can imagine went wrong. When I got the truck jacked up, it rolled off of the jack. Then, the spare tire's never been taken down from the frame before, so guess what? Because it had been pressed so tightly up against the frame for so long, the tire had slash marks on it and it had dry rotted. I now put a dry rotted tire on my truck and we limp to the next exit. We know we have to get back on the road and I just think there's no way we can do this. So because of the curse, we call Kenneth and Melinda and say we're sorry, but we just can't do it because we just can't risk it. Kenneth was supposed to come home in a couple of days so everything was good. Now we drive about 45 to 50 miles an hour all the way home being passed by everybody but we get home.

Now, I get up Monday morning and my brother-in-law David goes with me to the fields because he's going to disk the ground where we will sow the wheat while I'm shelling the corn. As soon as we get him going, guess what? We have to bearing down on the roller. But praise the Lord we've

got a turbo till also, so we don't have to change the bearing, we just hook the turbo till to the disk. We get everything going and David disked a while then Memish disked a while, and then I go to relieve Memish, and guess what? I farm at Land Between the Lakes and the deer herd is doubled in the last three years—and in this a hundred acre bottom I was in, let's just say the deer ate more than they were supposed to eat. All of those places where they ate more than they were supposed to eat, the Johnson grass and the cockleburrs, because of the curse, were taller than the corn. Now, that turbo till is not designed for that kind of work and it did not do what it needed to do...so the next day I have to change the bearing. I went to change the bearing and realized there was a bunch of other bearings going out too, so I put *nine* new barons on that rolling basket. Kory was going to come help disk a little bit and as we get ready to sow some seed, guess what happened? Kory comes to the field in the truck, I think he's done, he's going to haul a semi-load of corn off for me—brand new bearing, been in two hours, goes out, so we have to fix a bearing. Now again, I've just got 110 acres of corn and I'm going to be done. Now, before we got to this little field, because of the curse there was a tree down. No problem, except my chainsaw was not in my truck; my chainsaw was at home. That's like 45 minutes to get home, but I get the chainsaw, cut up this tree and we get the bearing going. Long story short, what most farmers can do in an hour, it took me four days!

Now get this picture...there's been another death, and then there's been another death. So when it rains Thursday night, I'm thinking, you know, my funeral is not until one o'clock, I can at least haul off that load of corn. I get in my semi, I'm coming up a big hill, and when I get to the top of the hill, which is a little bit muddy, I see that a deer hunter decided to park his truck in the road. So when I'm bringing 1,150 bushels of corn up in my semi and I start to make the turn, my front end doesn't hold, and it pushes toward the truck. I slam on the brakes to keep from hitting the truck and when I did, I lost all my traction. I'm now spinning on a hill...it's just me, I've got a funeral...what am I going to do? I wanted to honk my horn. I didn't. I just decide I'll back the truck down. But there's nowhere to turn this truck around. I start backing it down but that front end won't hold. Have you noticed in Kentucky that when we have a hills, we have a ditch

on one side and ditch on the other side? In about 10 minutes, my back two axles are in one ditch and my front two axles are in the other ditch, and I'm crossways in the road and I can't do anything. I walk about two miles to my truck, I call Memish, and she's going to bring some cables. Kory was teaching and he couldn't get there for a couple hours, so I call my friend Michael Palmer. Michael Palmer says, "Hey, I can help you." So Michael comes to help me. When Memish gets there, we decide we're just going to go get the tractor and we're going to pull the semi out with the tractor. We go to get the tractor that we just used to finish sowing the wheat with, and guess what? It won't start. It won't start! So we are going to jump it with our truck. Now our truck, because of the curse...when you open the hood those two little lift supports on the side will not hold the hood up, so we have to put a sledgehammer or an axe to hold the hood up. By now, when Memish starts to get the axe out, she just is dying laughing. And let me just say...the tractor would never start. So now, we go get our other tractor on the other end of LBL and I'm calling Jeff and Lori Jaco saying, "Guys, I'm sorry, but I've have to get this truck out the middle of the road. I may not get to come to the funeral." They said, "Bro. Ricky, it'll be okay. We're going to pray for you." They pray for me, Michael comes, we get the other tractor down there, and everything goes perfect. We get to the top of the hill, and guess what Michael Palmer said, God bless him! Michael Palmer said, "Bro. Ricky, I'm just going to make that trip to Paducah for you, don't you worry about it." I'm saying, "Praise the Lord!" Jeff and Lori are praying; everything's going to be good. I go home. Now, I sowed grass in my yard about a month ago, and it's not come up yet. That's not good. But when I came around the corner between the barn and the house, I could see little grass everywhere; it was beautiful. I hadn't seen it that morning because I had left early before light. I said to Memish, "Come out here. Look, we got grass everywhere!" I go in, I take a shower, I put my suit on, and I'm looking out my back door for some reason, and guess who's in the backyard? Three of my granddaughter's horses are in the backyard! Guess what they're doing? They're running through my new grass.

After I did the funeral, Michael Palmer said, "I'll help you shell corn"—no, not going to shell any more corn! I didn't do anything Friday afternoon, didn't do anything yesterday because of the curse. The curse is so bad my

Kentucky Wildcats got beat by the Alabama Crimson Tide yesterday! And Celisa's Tennessee Volunteers got crushed by Missouri...wow!

We just live in a world of unrighteousness! Everybody agree? Don't anybody ask me if I'm going to finish the crop this year! I probably won't, but it's okay. I am looking forward; I'm not looking at right now. But am I really? I mean, can I be totally honest with you? I think of all the teachings of the Bible, this is the one we neglect the most. There are hardly any of us here, who are healthy and have family, who are really looking forward to the new heaven and the new earth. We only want that for our dying relatives; we don't want it for ourselves. We don't want to go there. If we had the choice today to go, we would choose not to go. Now, I know my week was nothing compared to what's going on in the Middle East. My week was nothing compared to what's going on in Ukraine. My week is nothing compared to what's going on in Sudan. But do we wonder how life must have been for that early church for Peter to say since you are waiting, since you are looking forward to this new heaven, this new earth where there is no unrighteous, there is no sin, there is no curse, there is no death, there is no suffering, there is no war? He urges them to look forward. Do we look forward?

See, the reason Peter wants to look forward is because he's going to tell us four things that happen when we look forward, and if we're not looking forward, there's a good chance these four things aren't in our life. First, Peter says since we are looking forward, since we're waiting for these things, a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells, he then says this, "be diligent." This word, be diligent, is the same word that's used in chapter 1 but the ESV translates it as "make every effort." If you believe like Peter believes that you have a home on a new earth, under a new heaven, here's what he commands us: be diligent to, make every effort, put everything into this pursuit. What are we pursuing? We're pursuing to be found by Him without spot and blemish and at peace. Now, this word, found, is a legal word and it's the picture of you finding yourself in front of a judge. When you find yourself in front of the judge, you don't want emotion, you want evidence, and you want facts. Agreed? Here's the picture—on the day of the Lord when the earth and the works on it are

exposed, your works and my works are going to be exposed too—you're going to stand before God as judge. What you had better be making an effort to do is to not have any spots, no blemishes, and to be at peace on that day. You say...hold on; I'm a believer! What's that got to do with anything? You're still going to have to stand before the Lord. As a matter of fact, Paul wrote to the church at Corinth and they were doing some things he didn't think they ought to be doing. He said why in the world are you doing that, do you not know you're going to stand before God? Then he quotes the Old Testament that every tongue's going to confess and every knee's going to bow before Him, then he says so each one of us will give account of ourselves to Him. Paul wrote to the church at Rome, living in a tremendous time of persecution, and he reminded them—you better be careful how you're living your life because one day you are going to be judged and you're going to receive from God accordingly whether you've done good or whether you've done bad. Here's this picture. When Jesus comes back and the heavens are dissolving, you and I as believers are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and God's going to examine our life and the evidence is going to talk. And Peter says there had better not be any spots, better not be any blemishes, and you better be at peace.

Can I just say what Peter believes here? If you and I looked forward to a new home in heaven with God, but we knew before we get there that we're going to stand in front of Him and get an account of our life, it will change the way we live. Because when you get ready to open that mouth and you get ready to do whatever you're going to do, you do it not in light of now; you do it in light of eternity, and it changes everything. Wow! I want to remind all of us of something that I've reminded us through the years, and that's who we are. We are saints of God. God transformed us from sinners into saints and He has clothed us with the righteousness of His Son. We wear the suit, if I can say, of salvation. We wear the robe of righteousness, the righteousness of Christ. God does not want us to get it dirty. He doesn't want any spots on it.

You've heard me tell this before but I want to remind you again. If you walk into my closet, there are two sections of my closet. There are my

farm clothes, I call them my work clothes, and there are my church clothes. The reason I call them my work clothes is because this church has just convinced me that when I'm dirty and I'm farming, I'm working. But when I got my church clothes on, I'm clean, nobody sees dirt, and nobody ever says, "Wow, I see you're working." They only say I am working when I'm dirty. So I've got my work clothes and I got my church clothes. Here's my psychology—when I go to that work side of the closet, I don't think about dirt, I don't think about grease, don't think about oil. I've actually had grease on my hands and not have anything to wipe my hands with, so I just wipe them on my jeans. I have had a cheeseburger that I'm eating, grease running down my face, and because I'm in my work clothes, I just grab the bottom of my shirt that's already got grease and dirt on it and I wipe my mouth. I never think a thing because if I can be honest with you when I'm out in public and you see me, you're going to look at me and go, "Hey Bro. Ricky, you're working." And I love that because I love to work, so I don't think a thing about it. As a matter of fact, me and Celisa have this argument...I bring my dirty clothes in that have worn all day long and she wants me to put them in the dirty clothes hamper. Then she wants to take them out of the dirty clothes hamper and she wants to wash them and dry them. And I'm going, "Why are we going to do that? Why don't you just let me put them on, wear them two or three days, and get them really good and dirty because you're going to get them clean and I'm going to get them dirty tomorrow. Let's not waste the energy of you washing and drying them!" But here's what I want you to know—when I went to Marty's celebration of life for his mother and I went to Granny's celebration of life and I switched from those farm clothes to those church clothes, I had a different attitude. When I went to that side of the closet and I got out those clothes that had no stains—that white shirt, that tie, that suitcoat—I wouldn't even eat with them on. Do you know why I will not eat before a funeral? Because I can't get anything on me. Do you think I've ever worn a shirt that I knew had a spot on it to a funeral? Absolutely not! That would be disrespectful. Can you imagine me standing before a group of people with a spot on the front of my shirt? Nobody would see the suit and the white shirt you would see the spot, right?

So Friday after the funeral, I hadn't eaten and it was about three o'clock. They had this big chocolate cake and I couldn't stay and eat so I got a piece to go. I decided I was going to eat it in the truck, on the way home. I stopped by the Dairy Queen, and instead of just asking for a plastic fork (I didn't want to look like a cheapskate) so I ordered a Sprite and a double cheeseburger, but I was really just wanting to ask for a plastic fork. I'm the only guy that's ever ordered a cheeseburger and asked for a plastic fork with it! I got the fork and I asked for extra napkins. Do you know what I did? I took my suitcoat off, I took my tie off, I put a napkin in my lap, I put one down the front of that shirt, and I ate that cheeseburger as carefully as I could eat it. I usually devour chocolate cakes, but it took me the entire way home to eat that cake because my whole purpose was making sure Celisa did not have to take this suit to the cleaners! I was not going to get anything on that suit. I don't mean dirt; I'm talking about not even a spot!

How many of us live our life that way? You're not worried about your spots so you open that mouth and...you know what you say. You know what you do to get back at someone. You know the feelings of hate and the feelings of revenge and—you know those decisions you make. Not a decision you make in light of where your next home is going to be, but you make the decision in light of living right now in a place where there is unrighteousness. And you respond to that unrighteous rather than respond to the righteousness that's going to be revealed to you on the day of judgment! So we stand before God, we stand before fellow believers, and we stand before unbelievers with spots. You don't think a thing about it! Some of you men actually say to your wife, "Well, that's just the way I am." How many times have I got to ask you this? Are you kidding me? It should break our hearts.

Why is Peter using this language? He's using language because he has reminded us in the first letter that we were redeemed by the blood of Christ, like a lamb without spot and blemish! Throughout the Old Testament era, whenever you brought a sacrifice to God and you chose your animal, you didn't bring the one that was lame, you didn't bring the one that was sick, you didn't bring the one that was about to die; you brought the one without spot and blemish, because God is worthy of

our best! Do you know what this means? This means is we lived in the Old Testament era, and I'm a cattle farmer and I've got those Angus cattle that have the ability to win state shows, when I get ready to offer one to God, I don't give God the one that's ready to die; I give Him the one that's going to win the state fair. That's who you are to Him—He has cleansed us by the blood of His Son, and He's made us beloved sons! He's told us about our home in heaven and He doesn't want us to passively wait; He wants us to aggressively look forward. And as we're looking forward knowing we're going to meet Him, we're going to stand before Him, we don't want to stand before Him with any spot, no blemish!

So, no matter what's going on in my world of unrighteousness—with the flat tires, the down bearings, being stuck in two ditches at the same time with a semi, horses running through my new grass—there should be no reaction that reveals a spot or a blemish or fear or anxiety—but peace. Why do we not live that way? Here's why, and if I'm honest with you, I'm guilty—I don't live in light of my new home, and most of us don't. So do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to let what I think Peter meant here to happen...I'm going to let 1994 and how I could actually live on Dexter Road and let looking forward to building my new home affect every decision I made. I am going to commit the rest of my life to living that way right now. So from now on, I'm going to look forward, and as Kory named this series, Peter wants us to live forward. Next Sunday we're going to finish this paragraph and talk about how to deal with those spots and blemishes in light of this passage and in light of the second coming of Jesus.