

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. ¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

2 Peter 3:8-14

Dear Fellow Believers Waiting Patiently for Jesus:

I don't think I've ever quoted Mark Twain in a sermon. Although he was in name a Presbyterian, he was well known for his skepticism and frequent sarcasm toward the organized Christian religion. However, I ran across this quote and thought it interesting food for thought. Twain wrote, ***“Most people are bothered by those passages in the Bible that they cannot understand. But as for me, the passages in the Scripture that bother me most are the ones I do understand.”*** Yes, God's *clear* Word often hits us squarely between the eyes. When I see what God asks of me, and then reflect on how often I fail, it's bothersome!

The words of Peter before us today are not hard to understand, but they will challenge and bother us as we examine our lives. He asks an important question for us to grapple with: ***“What Kind of People Ought We to Be?”*** He answers: (1) ***People who appreciate God's patience***, and (2) ***People who make every effort to remain spotless.***

1

Peter writes, ***“But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”*** We've talked a lot about “The Day of the Lord” over the past few weeks during the End Times season of the Church Year. We were reminded to be prepared because the Last Day can come anytime.

The problem is, it's easy for us to let our guard down. Do you remember growing up with fire drills in school? When you're in kindergarten, the alarm goes off and your eyes get as big as saucers and your heart races. *“This could be the real thing!”* we're thinking. And we'd quickly line up like ducks in a row and proceed with orderly haste outside. But then as we got older, the alarm would sound and we're like, *“Oh great. Can't I just finish this chapter? Do I really have to go out in this weather?”* We think it's just a false alarm anyway...like the boy who cried wolf.

Peter says this is the world's (including ours) attitude about the Last Day: *“It's not going to be today because it wasn't yesterday or the day before that.”* But Peter is saying, ***“Yes, it could be today! It could be this hour! The only reason it hasn't happened yet is that the Lord ‘is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.’”*** God isn't apathetic, senile, or asleep. He hasn't come yet because, in his grace, he's patient...oh, so patient!

When we evaluate our lives against his Commandments, how can we conclude anything else? You and I roast people at the drop of a hat. One little mistake, and we can be all over them. Yet, God puts up with our gross thoughts, stabbing words, and selfish actions day after day. And all because he's patient with us. And all because of Jesus!

For believers, the Judge's arrival on the Last Day will be like the father who finally comes home after a long business trip, bursts unannounced through the door, arms wide open to hug his children, pockets stuffed with treats. The children's hearts aren't filled with terror, but with delight: *"Father! You're finally here!"* There is no wrath in this picture! God's wrath for sin will pass over us just like the Angel of Death passed over the Israelite homes in Egypt because they were marked with the blood of the Passover Lamb (*People's Bible*).

2

We have good reason to be prepared. The reason is gratitude to Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose blood covers our sins and who is preparing for us *"a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."* Knowing that heaven is awaiting us by God's grace, Peter says, *"Since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him."* He also says, *"What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives."* The point is, while we are here in this world waiting to inherit the new one, God encourages us to *"make every effort"* to live our lives for him. It's our way to say, *"Thank you, Jesus, for everything you've given me!"*

But here's the bothersome part. Can we honestly say that we really *"make every effort"* (100% effort) to live for him?

We know our own sinful natures. We also know the devil is prowling around like a lion looking to devour us. When his temptations stare us in the face, do we make every effort to get away, or do we just kind of hang around? Running away from the pull of the "heavy gravity" of temptation takes effort. E.g., it takes effort to **speak kindly** to my spouse when I'm angry. If God says, *"Make the effort,"* and we don't, that's sinful. Instead of making the effort, we have to admit that often we make excuses: *"But Lord, it's so hard!"* Do we think God doesn't know that? He isn't going to say, *"Oh. I never thought of that. Since it's so hard, just go ahead and let 'em have it both barrels if it makes you feel better!"* No, God tells us that Jesus made every effort for us: his life, his sacrifice on the cross. Motivated by Christ's loving effort, and tapped into Christ's strength, we can make every effort to put into practice Paul's direction: *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs"* (Eph 4:29).

Every excuse we make to try to justify our sins are signs of our spiritual immaturity. There is always room for growth. The spiritual maturing process teaches us to put away childish things. As we go to the Word and faithfully receive the Lord's Supper, spiritual growth happens by the power of the Holy Spirit. He teaches us to *"take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Cor 10:5) rather than to make excuses for why we can't obey. Yes, we realize that following Jesus perfectly is impossible, but we also find out that *"making every effort"* to do so is absolutely worth it.

Last week our fantastic LES students hung door hangers all around the community inviting them to come and hear the beautiful Christmas gospel of forgiveness and life. Before the students went out, they were reminded that they were representing their school -- which ultimately means they are representing their Lord since we are a Christian school. The obvious message? *"Make every effort to be a good ambassador for Christ. We don't want to embarrass our Savior or ruin his good reputation."* And, all praise to God, the students did a wonderful job!

How about us? How about day-to-day? *"What kind of people ought we to be?"* Like the students, we want to represent our Savior well at home, in the workplace, at the store, on the court. We want to *"make every effort"* to be examples of God's love, God's kindness, God's purity, and God's amazing patience. Jesus made every effort necessary to redeem and save us. How thankful we are for Jesus' forgiveness! *"What kind of people ought we to be?"*: People who appreciate God's gracious patience toward us, and people who make every effort to live to Jesus' glory!

Amen.