

1 Peter 1:17-21 (Part III)

Introduction

As we come back to the book of 1 Peter this morning, we remember that we're in a section that's built around five imperatives – five commands. The first two commands are these: “Set your hope fully on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ,” and “Be holy in all your conduct.” (vv. 13-16)

The third command comes in the context of a single long sentence that started in verse 17 and ends this morning in verse 21. And the third command for us to hear and obey is this: “Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.” So let's read this whole sentence together, and as we do, let's not forget that it's all built around this third command to us:

And **if** you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's work,
conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,

knowing that you were ransomed **from** the futile conduct of your ancestral family heritage, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with precious blood, like that of a lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of **Christ**,

the one who was foreknown before the foundation of the world
and now the one who was made manifest in the last times
for the sake of you
who through him are believers in God,
the one who raised him from the dead and
the one who gave him glory,
so that your faith and hope are in God.

Are you able to see, now, how everything that comes before and after that command to conduct ourselves in this world with fear is all intended to support that command and to give us the proper motivation to live in obedience to that command? Last time we were in Peter, we ended with that climactic reference to the “precious blood, like that of a lamb without blemish and without spot, [the blood of] **Christ**.” And now, without any break, Peter goes on to talk more about *Christ*. Why? In order that we might be all the more faithful to truly conduct ourselves with fear throughout the time of our exile in this fallen world. This Christ, whose shed blood has ransomed us, is:

I. 1 Peter 1:20a — the one who was foreknown before the foundation of the world...

What does it mean to say that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world? Of course, it means more than just to say that God knew about Jesus and His saving work ahead of time. To say that God **foreknew** Christ means that God loved Him, and chose Him, and appointed Him, and set Him apart before the world was ever made. (cf. Gal. 1:15; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; Jer. 1:4-5) It means **more** than that. It means that before the world was ever made God loved

Christ, and chose Him, and appointed Him, and set Him apart *for* that specific work of redeeming and ransoming sinners through the shedding of His precious blood.

What Peter wants you and me to think about and contemplate is that **Christ, the redeemer**, was not an afterthought to God, He wasn't a last-minute response to all the mess of our sin and rebellion. It wasn't just **Christ**, but **Christ the redeemer** who was foreknown by God even *before* the need for our redemption ever existed – even before *sin* had ever entered the world. Not just **Christ**, but **Christ the redeemer**, had been loved and chosen and appointed by God even before Adam and Eve ever walked in the Garden of Eden – even before there was sun, or moon, or stars, or dry land, or seas, or day and night. Even from all eternity past, God's plan for the world—and His plan for His own glory—has all been centered in the *redeeming* person of Jesus Christ.

Those are big thoughts; but according to the Apostle Peter they're worth thinking. And we'll see one reason why in just a moment. So **think**, now, of all those eternal ages before the foundation of the world when **this redeemer—Christ—was “only” foreknown** by God. And now **think again**, if you can, of **all those eternal ages before the foundation of the world** when the redeemer—Christ—was *“only” foreknown* by God.

Here's the one that God has loved and chosen and appointed to be the pinnacle of all the revelation of His great glory, **and yet(!)** for ETERNAL – AGES – PAST He remained only foreknown, because there wasn't as yet even any world for Him to exist in, or any people in need of redeeming.* But then, finally, “in the beginning,” after all of those past eternal ages, God created the heavens and the earth. And so began the ages, not of eternity, but of history – a history that was intended only to be the stage for that one whom God had foreknown from all eternity past. And yet *still*—for long ages and generations—Christ the redeemer remained hidden; foreknown by God, loved, chosen, called, and set apart – but still hidden, unrevealed, unknown by any man, or woman, or child.† (cf. Col. 1:24-27; Rom. 16:25-27)

It is against **this** backdrop of **Christ foreknown** in all the ages of eternity past, and now also **Christ foreknown** in all the long ages and generations of history past that Peter would have us understand the **times** in which we find ourselves living now. Are you already feeling the joy and the weight of where Peter is going with this? Christ, the redeemer, is the one who was foreknown before the foundation of the world...

II. 1 Peter 1:20b — ...and now the one who was made manifest [*phaneroo*] in the last times...‡

* The emphasis here is not on Christ's preexistence as the eternal Son of God (cf. Jn. 17:5, 24; 1 Jn. 1:1-2), but rather on Christ's entrance into creation and history as the redeemer of men and women.

† The point in Peter is not Christ's shadowing forth in the Old Testament, but his actual manifestation and incarnation in creation and history.

‡ Cf. 1 Peter 1:10-12

Colossians 1:24-27 — Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery **hidden for ages and generations but now revealed** [*phaneroo*] to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

What are the times in which we live? They are the **last** times. Now when you hear that, how does that make you feel? Can you see that the point isn't any "doom and gloom" of the last times, but rather the unparalleled privilege and joy of the last times? Because, think about it, what is it that has inaugurated these last times in which we live? It is, **FINALLY**, the **manifestation** of Christ the redeemer – the one foreknown by God—loved, chosen, called, and set apart—from **before the foundation of the world**. (cf. Eph. 1:9-10; Gal. 4:4-5) Let me ask you this: What is 2000 years against all the long ages and generations since Adam and Eve? (I'm not talking here about evolutionary ages.) We could even ask: What is 2000 years against all the uncounted ages of eternity past? Can't you see now, against all the full sweep of time and eternity, how these last 2000 years since Christ the redeemer was made manifest are truly the very "**last** times"?

- Hebrews 9:26 — Christ has appeared [*phaneroo*] once for all **at the end of the ages** to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

It's that **time** element that's so important for us to grasp here.

- 1 Corinthians 10:11 — Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the **end of the ages** has come.

Sometimes people say to me: "I really believe we're living in the last times." And what is my response? "Yes, we are! And we have been ever since the one who was foreknown **before the foundation of the world** was actually made manifest **in this world** 2000 years ago." But then they might say to me: "No, I'm talking about really the last times, the times right before the end." And what is my response? "But that's what the last 2000 years have **all** been! They are the times right before the end!"

- Acts 2:16–17 — **This is** what was uttered through the prophet Joel: "And in **the last days** it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams..."
- Hebrews 1:1–2 — Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in **these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son

Titus 1:1–3 — Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised **before the ages began** and **at the proper time manifested** [*phaneroo*] in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior.

Romans 16:25–27 — Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was **kept secret for long ages** but **has now been disclosed** [*phaneroo*] and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

2 Timothy 1:8–10 — Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus **before the ages began**, and which **now has been manifested** [*phaneroo*] through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

- Jude 17–19[§] — **You must remember**, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said **to you**, “In the **last time** there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” **It is these who cause divisions...**
- 2 Timothy 3:1–5^{**} — Understand this, that **in the last days** there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive... **Avoid such people.**
- 2 Peter 3:1–5^{††} — Remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the **last days** with scoffing...” For they deliberately overlook this fact...
- James 5:3 (NET)^{‡‡} — Your gold and silver have rusted and their rust will be a witness against you. It will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the **last days** that you have [been hoarding] treasure!

All of these passages speak of the “last days,” or the “last time” as already **fully present then**. And so, also, we read in 1 John:

- 1 John 2:18 — Children, **it is the last hour**, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that **it is the last hour**.

There is no last hour other than the last hour that John and his readers were living in, and that we ourselves are still living in today. In other words, the Bible makes no distinction between the last times, and the **really last, last** times, and when we make this distinction, we’re really robbing ourselves of the full weight of this awesome reality that these days **are, for real**, without any caveat or qualification **the very LAST times**.

Now to this point, we’ve always been referring to a period of time – a period of time that has so far lasted for 2000 years. But the Bible also tells us of a single, decisive, climactic moment in time when these last days will come to their end.

- John 12:48 — The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him **on the last day**.
- Matthew 13:47–50 (cf. 13:39–40) — ...so it will be **at the end of the age**. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace.
- 1 Peter 1:5 — ...who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed **in the last time [kairos]**.
- John 6:40 (cf. 6:39, 44, 54; 11:24) — For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up **on the last day**.

Do you see how all of these passages speak not of any period of time, but of a single decisive moment? When Peter speaks of the “last days,” he’s thinking of the last days—and he wants us

[§] See Schreiner (NAC), Davids (PNTC), and Green (ECNT)

^{**} See Lea and Griffin (NAC) and Knight (NIGCT); see also Schreiner’s commentary on Jude 18

^{††} See Moo (NIVAC), Green (ECNT), Davids (PNTC), and Schreiner (NAC); cf. Bauckham (WBC)

^{‡‡} Cf. NIV; HCSB; See Martin (WBC), Moo (PNTC), Davids (NIGTC), Nystrom (NIVAC), and Adamson (NICNT); “You have laid up treasure in days that are coming to an end”)

to think of the last days—not only in light of **all the preceding ages** of history and eternity past, but also in light of **the final end** that **they immediately precede**. In other words: If these last times are days of privilege and joy because they were **begun** by the appearing **in this world** of Christ who was foreknown **before the foundation of the world**, then they are also days of privilege and joy because they come immediately before the end—immediately before the return of Christ, and the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment, followed by the age to come. (cf. Mat. 12:32; Mk. 10:29-30; Heb. 6:5; Luke 20:34-36) And what this means is that we are meant to live, **now**, in the constant reality that the coming of Christ is always “at hand” – always imminent – always “near.” Not only is Christ’s coming the very next, and final scheduled event on God’s redemptive calendar, but it is, as it were, constantly on the very edge of happening. Listen to how one writer puts it:

The course of history “has... altered its direction, as regards [Christ’s] second coming, and runs, not towards the end, but along it, and on the brink of it; and is at all times near that great event, which, did it run towards it, it would at once run into. Christ, then, is ever at our doors.” (Newman; quoted in Marshall’s commentary on the Epistles of John in the NICNT)

Maybe, now, we can better understand when we read language like this in our New Testament:

- 1 Peter 4:7 — The end of all things is **at hand**; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.
- James 5:8 — Be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is **at hand**.
- Romans 13:11–12 — Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is **at hand**. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.
- Philippians 4:5 — Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is **at hand**.

Are you coming to see now this pivotal, climactic time in which we all live?—A time when Christ has already been revealed in history and so also a time when the end of all things, and the beginning of all the uncounted ages to come, is now **at hand**? (cf. Eph. 2:4-7) And so now we’re ready for Peter to bring it all home to us in the next **two** words in the Greek and five words in English. Christ, the redeemer, is “the one who was foreknown before the foundation of the world **and** now the one who was made manifest in the last times...”

III. 1 Peter 1:21 — ...for the sake of you...

Are you reading and hearing these words in faith? One commentator calls these words “stupendous.” (Davids) Another one sees here “stunning privilege.” (Schreiner) We are the ones on whom the end of the ages has come. (1 Cor. 10:11) And here’s the most amazing part of all: This has happened **not** by accident. God has specially and purposefully **chosen** you and me for this indescribable privilege of living—in—the last—times. Remember what Peter said in verse two: We, too, have been “**chosen** according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, chosen in the sanctification of the Spirit, chosen for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Which is really all to say that these last times have all been planned before the foundation of the

world **for us**, and that we ourselves were actually planned and chosen by God **for** life in these last times. Once more, this is what Peter wants us to see: Not **only** that we are living in the last times, but that we were planned for these last times and that these last times were all actually planned for us. (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-7)

Paul says in Ephesians that God “chose **us** in Christ before the foundation of the world.” (Eph. 1:4) There’s a real sense in which this could be said of all God’s *true* people both under the Old Covenant and now under the New Covenant. And yet are you seeing how there’s also a sense in which these words are uniquely and especially true of us **upon whom the end of the ages has come**? Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world **for the sake of you**, *and* He has now been made manifest in the last times **for the sake of you**...

IV. 1 Peter 1:21

who through him are believers in God,
the one who raised him from the dead and
the one who gave him glory,
so that your faith and hope are in God.

Peter’s saying that as those living in the last times, we have the privilege of believing in God as the one who has now raised Christ from the dead. We have the privilege of believing in God as the one who has now seated Christ at His own right hand in glory. That’s already wonderful, but Peter’s thinking of even more.

The resurrection of Jesus and His enthronement in glory are not just **past** events in history, they’re also living realities right now **in the present**. And if they’re living realities right now **in the present**, then they’re also living deposits and powerful guarantees of our **future hope**. Let’s think about it like this: If Jesus has already been raised from the dead and been given glory, then all of us who through Him have believed in God are also sharing **today** in His resurrection life and power and therefore we will **one day in the future** be raised up from the dead to reign with Him forever and ever, never to die again. These are the things that make the last days the last days!

While the Old Testament believers may have believed that they would one day be raised from the dead to share in the Messiah’s kingdom, *they* didn’t have the seed of Christ’s resurrection life already planted within them – as we do; and they were never seated with Christ in the heavenly places – as we have been today. (cf. Eph. 1:20; 2:6; Col. 3:4) So what this means is that our faith and our hope are in God in a way that would be inconceivable to all the previous ages and generations of the world. Our faith, and our hope, and our joy are increased exponentially **just because** we are those upon whom the end of the ages has come – because **we** are those living—in—the last—times.

Conclusion

So what is Peter’s point in saying all this to us? Why is it God’s will that we should work so diligently to truly know and understand these things? Did you notice how with this closing reference to our faith and **hope** in God, Peter has come full circle all the way back to the first

command in verse 13? And what was that? “Set your **hope** fully on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” In fact, Peter’s even brought us full circle, all the way back to the very beginning of the letter in verse three: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abounding mercies, has begotten us anew to a living **hope** *through* the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

A strong, and vibrant, and growing hope is the key to holy living, and there is nothing to strengthen our hope like the knowledge of this stunning privilege that is ours of living now in **the LAST TIMES**.

“Historians may mark off the ages according to developments in politics or technology (the iron age, the colonial period, the computer age), but in God’s book the last age of human history is ushered in by the coming of Jesus Christ... It is the age of Christ’s resurrection and glory, a time when the light of eternity shines on the pilgrim people of God, illumining the life of the humblest believer.” (Clowney)

The whole sweep of history and eternity is focused on Christ, and so *in* Christ also **on us**, setting us—foreigners and sojourners though we may be in this world—at center stage in God’s eternal plan of redemption. (cf. Achtemeier) How’s that for putting all of life into perspective – every situation and circumstance, every trial and temptation, every joy and every sorrow? Not only do we come at the consummation of all the previous ages and even of all eternity past, but we come in the time immediately preceding the end of all things when Christ returns. Not only are we living in the last times, but God actually chose you and me **for** these last times and planned these last times from before the foundation of the world **for us**. For us, then, it can be no exaggeration at all to say that hope springs eternal. And it’s the **living out** of this hope that **is holiness** – the living out of this hope **is** what it means to “be holy... in all your conduct.”

But we know there’s one other reason that God would have us work so diligently to understand the nature of the **times** in which we live. Hope **and fear**; faith **and trembling**. These things can never, ever, truly be separated. If the strength of your hope is directly proportionate to the stunning privilege of living in these last times, then so also will be the reality of our fear and trembling. In other words, the more you understand the stupendous privilege of living in these last times, the **more** you will **naturally** fear and tremble at the thought of spurning or in any way treating lightly these privileges that are ours.^{§§}

- Hebrews 10:28–29 (cf. 12:25) — Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?
- Hebrews 6:4–8 — For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the

^{§§} “The reference to the end of the ages as the time at which Christ appeared... emphasizes the need to take the redemptive events seriously. The time is drawing near when that will no longer be possible.” (Achtemeier)
“The stunning privilege of believers is communicated once again because all these things occurred “for your sake.” What a tragedy it would be to throw all these privileges away by ceasing to live in the fear of God.” (Schreiner)

goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

If the last times bring with them unparalleled privilege and joy, then how can they not also bring with them unparalleled accountability and responsibility? (Mat. 10:14–15; 12:41–42; 11:20–24) And it's precisely as we hear these words and see their truth and tremble at them that we can then experience the full **comfort** of hearing what the writer of Hebrews says next:

➤ Hebrews 6:9 — Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.

Brothers and sisters, we are standing on the brink: the last times have dawned and now we live in constant anticipation of their end at any moment with the final appearing of Christ our King. (cf. Davids) Therefore... **THEREFORE!!!**:

“Set your hope fully on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

“Be holy in all your conduct.”

“Conduct yourselves with fear and trembling throughout the time of your exile.”

Hebrews 13:20–21 — Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.