

Dear Friends,

I like to ponder questions, so I often try to teach by questions. Encourage my readers or hearers to think, to think according to Biblical "Logic" and come to Biblical conclusions regarding life's problems. The title I chose for this week's Gleanings, "**Watch for What?**" follows that habit. Every action Peter teaches in these verses require a firm foundation within our own minds. Our first area to "**Watch**" in our Christian life is our own mind. Our minds are constantly flooded with fear and paranoia from this world. Evil people exist, and, of course, evil people always have evil designs. So what's new about that? How much time and energy did Jesus devote to such ideas in His ministry? How about none? In writing prophetically of Jesus' coming, David wrote the second Psalm in which he references powerful people scheming against "**The Lord and against his Christ.**" And how did God react? He laughed! There is not a thing you or I can do to defeat evil in this world. Our only profitable--and Biblical--labor is in our own mind. The more we control our minds and discipline our thoughts to the faith of Jesus the more our personal conduct will reflect Jesus and His faith-way of living. That faithful conduct is our "**Light on a hill.**" No country in existence is God's "Light on a hill." Jesus didn't speak those words to a country. He spoke them to His disciples who joined Him in the mountains apart from the crowds. The Sermon on the Mount where these words appear in our New Testament, was spoken to Jesus' disciples only. (Matthew 5:1 KJV) If we want to be the Lord's credible "Light on a hill," we need to study and practice Peter's teaching in our study passage.

With every thought, with every decision we face, Peter reminds us that we need to face life soberly and with prayer, to live in company with godly people in charity, and to "**Watch**" our own minds to ensure that we are practicing this teaching. We each live with strong tugs to react to the evil and unfairness of this world, to strike out against it, but that reactive energy will fail. We win the battle against evil only as we engage evil in our own minds. (Ephesians 6:10-20, especially verses 12-13 KJV) In his similar armor symbolism in Romans 6, Paul warns us to "**Yield**" our body as an instrument in God's hand for God's use.

We need Peter's lesson today. Lord nudge us strongly with its instructive teaching.

Lord bless,
Joe Holder

Watch for What?

But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. (1 Peter 4:7-9 KJV 1900)

Scripture reminds us regularly of the Lord's present all-inclusive discernment of every thought, word, and deed man commits. It also affirms that a time certain is coming when He shall raise the dead and judge all humanity. No skeptic's empty objection shall prevail. Great or small, no one can delay or dismiss that judgment. "...**at hand**" reminds us that nothing remains in God's prophetic calendar other than that glorious day itself. If something is "At hand," it is imminent in some form or another. When John wrote Revelation, he introduced his letter with the notation that the revelation of Jesus Christ in the symbols of the letter "is

at hand.” (Revelation 1:1-3 KJV) When John the Baptist started preaching in the wilderness that the “Kingdom of God” (Or “heaven” depending on which gospel you are reading), Jesus appeared, was baptized by John, and immediately started preaching the same message, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” When Jesus began His public ministry, God’s kingdom was present. No delay awaited it.

What is the meaning of “at hand” in such passages as our study passage? A few “Commentary” ideas appear below:

1. First century religious Jewish people believed Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy and understood that his prophecy’s “Alarm clock” was ready to ring in their lifetime. Many also believed that, once Messiah made His appearance, the end of time and God’s final judgment would follow in short order. Often commentaries will suggest that the writers of the New Testament also believed this idea, so they wrote the New Testament honestly thinking it would occur soon. However, this idea imposes an uninspired human error onto the content of New Testament Scripture. Further, 2 Thessalonians and other Scriptures refute rather than affirm that the writers of the New Testament held to this idea.

2. Certain prophetic schools of thought interpret these passages as using “end of all things” or similar terms as the end of Old Testament worship which would soon be replaced by the New Testament form of worship.

This is a true conclusion, but do these “end of all things” passages always intend that idea? Perhaps some do, but I cannot comfortably impose that idea onto every appearance of the term in the New Testament. I am more comfortable with this view for passages in the gospels, but not throughout subsequent New Testament writings. Some of the New Testament letters (After the gospels) were written soon after Jesus ascended. Others were written several decades after Jesus ascended. The New Testament Church and form of worship was already established and accepted by the believing community of the church. Revelation, for example, was likely the last New Testament letter written. One school of interpretation for Revelation dates it shortly before 70 AD. The majority view dates Revelation in the last decade of the first century. Either date is far too late to use the term to refer to the end of the old and beginning of the new way of faith and worship.

3. The view that I hold is this. With the completion of Jesus’ atonement for our sins, establishing His followers in His faith, His body of beliefs/truth, and His ascension, no Bible prophecy remains unfulfilled, other than the Second Coming itself. Therefore, in terms of Biblical logic, the time of the Second Coming is “At hand” from the time of the New Testament’s writing till the Second Coming. Nothing other than the Lord’s own timeline and purpose hinders His return. Therefore, New Testament writers or contemporary preachers and Christians can rightly regard the Second Coming as being “At hand.” The Grace New Testament Commentary captures this thought nicely when explaining this lesson. “When he says the end ... is at hand, he uses a perfect tense verb (ēggiken) to communicate the idea of ‘has drawn near and everything is in place’ for judgment to begin.”

The challenge for Bible believers is not if He shall come and judge, or even when, but how should we respond to that knowledge in our daily life? What difference in how we live does that knowledge make? I fear that we tend to “Box up” that idea into a “Far, far away” section of our minds and give little to no thought about it in terms of how we live today. Scripture consistently links our belief in that day with how we live, and Peter’s lesson for this week follows that pattern. If we follow Peter’s words and most other New Testament writers’ words, the Lord’s return could occur today. If you knew the Lord would return before the end of the day, how would you use your time and energy today?

New Testament thinking affirms this “At hand” abiding mindset. However, it also counterbalances that thought with admonitions to fully invest our life today in serving and ministering to other children of God who need our help and encouragement. Interestingly, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 and context, Paul teaches that believers who are capable of working should work, not depend on others for support, in addition to working to provide for believers who can’t work. I’ve occasionally teased regarding the language of a hymn. Some editions of the hymn read, “We’ll wait till Jesus comes,” and other editions read, “We’ll work till Jesus comes.” My teasing suggestion, “We’ll work while we wait till Jesus comes.”

...**be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.** The Louw-Nida New Testament Greek Dictionary defines the Greek word translated “**be sober**” as “...**to have understanding about practical matters and thus be able to act sensibly—to have sound judgment, to be sensible, to use good sense, sound judgment.**” The focus of the word is internal, cultivate the ability to wisely and rightly understand matters facing us so that we react—and act—sensibly and righteously. The same dictionary defines the Greek word translated “**Watch**” as “...**to be in control of one’s thought processes and thus not in danger of irrational thought processes.**” Peter’s teaching requires that we control our minds, our thought processes, not play the helpless victim over our mind.

By combining these two words and ideas in this context, Peter builds his teaching on the foundation of a firm belief in the Second Coming and the Lord’s certain and righteous judgment. Based on this belief, we should study Scripture, including lingering reflections and meditations on its teachings, so that we gain its wisdom (To replace our impetuous and self-focused ideas) and thereby learn to act on our faith, not react to the empty windmills of alarm and fear that abound in our world. My “Working definition” of Biblical wisdom is to cultivate “Art in the skill of a righteous, God-honoring life.”

...**unto prayer.** If we immerse our minds and thoughts in this world, in anything related to it, we shall soon become reactive to the fearful bad news it always brings. In powerful contrast, a fixed belief in the imminent (It could occur at any time) coming and judgment of the Lord urges us to immerse our minds in Scripture, learn its precepts, and act on our faith, not react to fearful bad news. Prayer, not fear or paranoia, is the faithful believer’s godly reaction to life with a fixed heart on the Lord’s return. Pause and reflect. What most dominates your thinking? Your daily energy? If it is fear and growing anxiety regarding anything or anyone in this world, regroup and go back to your Bible and the faith of Jesus.

A beautiful example. Years ago, a preacher told a touching personal experience that will make this point. When World War II started, he was draft age and had just completed his seminary training, planning to begin his ministry as a pastor. He joined the army and became an Army chaplain. He went through the war in this position. As the war entered its final stage, he found himself on a landing craft at Normandy Beach. Big guns, mortar shells, and gunfire were all around him. His commander had warned the group that likely many, perhaps most of them would not live to see the end of the day. As the craft neared the beach, horrible fear overwhelmed him. Instead of encouraging the soldiers in the craft, he found himself cowering in fear at the back of the boat. He tried to pray for the Lord’s help. Almost as if by spoken words, the Lord reminded

him, “You are either going home (To your family), or you are coming home (to me).” The Lord reminded him of the certain truth of heaven, life after death, and the Lord’s final return and judgment. Immediately, his mind changed. His fear vanished, he rushed through the soldiers to the boat commander, and asked permission to be the first man to exit the boat at landing. He endured wounds, but he lived to become that pastor and to learn the glorious doctrines of the grace of God. The power of this truth which replaced this man’s fear with faith and courage is yours and mine every day we live. We need only abandon our reactions to this world and turn our hearts to the Lord, and to His teachings in Scripture.

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Scripture teaches that love, love for God and love for His people, is a major discipline that we should daily cultivate. However, it also teaches that other Biblical teachings also exist and should claim our minds and faith. Peter’s “**Above all things**” makes that point.

Ponder the fruit of Biblical love. It “...**shall cover the multitude of sins.**” If we live this Biblical love “**Above all things,**” we never nit-pick or fault-find our brothers and sisters in the faith. The passage nudges us to look carefully into the gospel mirror. How much time do we spend criticizing or magnifying the faults of our brothers and sisters who do not agree with us? If that is the image you see, you will not see “**Above all charity.**” This kind of love does not rationalize or justify sins. Far from it. It rather “covers” them. You don’t tell everyone you know about someone else’s failures. If you do discover their failures, refuse to repeat them to anyone under any circumstance. Pray for that person. Encourage them in their faith.

Use hospitality one to another without grudging. Hospitality means that we show hospitable grace toward the people we meet, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ. Don’t be content with showing this “Hospitality” only toward the folks in your church. How do you treat contractors who work for the church? Who work for you at home? Do you show them the same grace? Or do you attack them with vengeance? And practice this grace “**without grudging.**” Do it without resentment. Refuse to adopt the “I’ll do it, but I don’t have to like it” mindset. Acts of “Hospitality” are acts of kindness and grace, and they are only possible when we choose to do them out of that same kindness and grace within. If we allow “Grudging” in our hearts, we cannot at all practice Biblical hospitality.

Peter’s instructive lesson based on the certain coming and judgment of the Lord forms what I refer to as the New Testament “Resurrection gospel.” Make it your gospel, your faith, today.

Elder Joe Holder