Now, when you know that some big event is coming up in your life, it impacts the way you behave, doesn't it. Let's say you're moving house in a week's time. Do you spend that time painting your nails or watching back-to-back movies of *Lord of the Rings*? No. You spend it packing. Or imagine a young couple getting married in a month's time? Do they spend that month apart, hardly talking to each other, only exchanging the odd text message in which they talk about the political situation in Outer Mongolia? No - they're inseparable and all they can talk about is the wedding and planning for the wedding, much to their friends' annoyance.

So look at v14 from today's reading, 'Therefore, beloved, *since you are waiting for these things*…' And if you were here last week, you know what he's talking about: v13, 'We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.'

So the making of all things new is coming, Peter says, so v14 again, 'Therefore…' let that knowledge of what's coming impact your life. You do that for moving house or getting married, so why not with the end of this world?

And of course, at least in the West, pretty much everyone would agree with that. The environmental scientists tell us the world is already burning, so decrease your carbon footprint, reduce your dependence on fossil fuel, live sustainably, buy local. Let the prospect of the world's end change your behaviour.

Except that message, at least in the young, creates huge amounts of anxiety, because, in their own words, there's no Planet B. Plus, even if temperature rises can be halted or reversed, one day, in however many millions of years' time, the universe will cool down and life will cease to be. Which means, however hard you try, your efforts to save the planet don't just increase anxiety, ultimately, they're pointless.

Not so, Peter says, because we're not waiting for the death of Planet Earth, we're waiting for the new heavens and the new earth, for the New Creation out of this creation. And as you wait for that Peter says it can change your life in ways that go far deeper and with far further reaching consequences than just changing your carbon footprint or not buying oranges from Spain. And it'll do it in ways that are good for you, for your neighbour and for the world that you steward.

Be Diligent
Verse 14 again, 'Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.'

Now, when he's talking about spots and blemishes, he's not talking about acne or use of skin care products. He's talking about Christ and the character of Christ. You see, in the Old Testament, if someone had sinned and needed to atone for their sin, they would do that by sacrificing a lamb or a goat. But that animal had to be flawless. They couldn't just take one of the maimed or diseased animals that wouldn't cost them anything, that was going to die anyway, and give that to God. It had to be the best. Because sin is costly and what was unhealthy could not make healthy, what was damaged could not make whole. What was imperfect could not atone for sin. Only the spotless, only the perfect could.

But of course, those sacrifices where only signposts pointing forward to Jesus, because in his first letter Peter says we have been redeemed, our sins paid for, by 'the precious blood of Christ, *like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*' (1 Peter 1:19).

You see, we are all stained and blemished by sin. We think stuff and say stuff and do stuff we shouldn't. Or don't do stuff we should. Except for Jesus. Because he was flawless in his character. And at the cross, our sin, and the stain and the shame of our sin, was counted to him, and he was blemished and bruised for us, so that his righteousness might be counted to us.

And Peter's saying, as you look to the future and the judgment to come, be diligent to remember that. If you are prone to anxiety about the end or the future judgment, preach the gospel to yourself. You are made spotless and blameless in Christ.

But also, be diligent to become more like him.

You see, remember from last week how Peter calls us in v11 to live lives of 'holiness and godliness.' But what does that look like? It would help to know wouldn't it! I mean, when you're trying to achieve something - it helps to know what you're aiming at. When you get in the car, it helps to know where you're heading to. When you sit down to revise for an exam, it helps to know the subject you're going to be examined on. So… when it comes to holiness and godliness, and your character - what are you to be diligent about becoming? More like Jesus, Peter's saying.

And so he isn't so much bringing this letter to a close as summarising what he's already said. Right back at the start, in chapter 1:5, he wrote, 'For this very reason, *make every effort* to supplement your faith with virtue.'

Now, when you were a kid you probably experienced your mother walking into your bedroom and saying something like 'this room is not going to tidy itself.' But the same is true for your character, and becoming more and more like Jesus, and less and less like yourself. Living life with the new heavens and the new earth in mind, and growing in Christlike character, is not going to happen by osmosis alone. We're not amoeba - just passively absorbing. Now, sure that happens but rarely in a good way. Instead, if you want your character to change, if you want to become more like the One whose righteousness is already counted to you, you've got to apply yourself to it.

But compare *that* to the false teachers Peter's been tackling in this letter. Because in 2:13 he describes them as 'blots and blemishes, revelling in their deceptions.' In other words, they're the opposite of spotless and without blemish. And yet they're saying, 'become more like us and throw off this fear about future judgment', Peter's saying, no, do the opposite, become more like Jesus.

But also, v14 again, 'Be diligent to be found… *at peace*.' Now, as we've already said that thinking about the world's end can produce the opposite of peace. It can produce anxiety and conflict. But as you wait for the new heavens and the new earth, Peter is saying, you can experience peace in place of inner turmoil, and peace in place of conflict. Why? How?

Firstly, when you know that Christ is your righteousness, then the future, and what Peter calls the place where 'righteousness dwells' has no fear for you, it's the opposite. And that kills anxiety.

But secondly, knowing your righteousness comes from Jesus and you don't deserve it, kills the self-righteousness in you that thinks you're better than others, whatever your view on the environment, which reduces conflict.

But thirdly, it'll also do a better job of changing the way you use and consume resources than fear or anxiety ever will, because how good you feel about yourself won't be tied up with your possessions or your experiences or your latest exotic holiday destination. It'll be tied up with Christ. So you'll live more simply.

And instead of using your resources in an endless cycle of consumption, seeking to prove yourself, of feel good about yourself, as you grow more like Jesus you'll use your resources for the good of others - because that's what he did for you.

So, firstly, be diligent. But secondly…

Count
Reckon. Consider. Verse 15, 'And count the patience of our Lord as salvation…'

Now, if you haven't experienced it yet, one of the strange things about Su is that she counts in Japanese. We'll be doing some mental arithmetic and she'll go…. And I will not have a clue what she's saying. But the answer's generally correct. But if it wasn't I would not know.

What if it was like that with life? What if you or someone else was getting the maths about life wrong? There's even an expression for it, isn't there - adding 2 plus 2 and getting 5. You have this data about something - maybe a conversation you overheard, or someone's response, and you're putting it together but coming to wrong conclusions. So what if you took the data of life, and the time before the end, and came to wrong conclusions?

Well, that's exactly what these false teachers have been doing. They were counting the days since Jesus was on earth, and hadn't yet returned, and they added that up to conclude he never would: 'So let's live just however we want to live.' And maybe your internal calculations are doing something similar. If you're not yet a Christian, maybe like them you're counting all the years since Jesus was alive and you're adding that up to equal his non-existence, or as a reason to think he doesn't have any claim on you. Or maybe you count the shortness of life and you add that up to YOLO - You Only Live Once, so live for pleasure or thrills or comfort. But whatever you do, live for yourself.

But that, Peter says, would be to count wrongly. Instead, as we wait for the new heavens and new earth, we should count God's patience - the days given to us - as salvation. That if you're not yet a Christian, he's giving you time to become one. And for those of us who are, we should also count them as days of salvation, days when the Holy Spirit is drawing people to himself, days for sharing the good news of Christ and spreading the gospel. And ladies, as you have your event next week, and for all of us with the Advent guest services to come, what better time to do that than in these days of salvation?

Ok, but then Peter makes what seems an odd turn. Verses 15-16, '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.*'

Now, why bring up Paul?

Probably because these false teachers were using Paul's teaching that we're saved by grace and not by obeying the Law, to say, 'there you go - Paul's on our side! Peter's telling you, live a life of virtue - but Paul says you can live how you want and God'll still love you.'

And in response, Peter's saying 'No. Look at Paul's letters where he speaks of these things' - like Romans 2:4, 'Or do you presume on the riches of [God's] kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that *God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance.*' We are saying the same thing, Peter says. God's grace is a reason to repent and live lives of holiness, not carelessness.

But then look how Peter describes him, 'Our beloved brother Paul.' So it's not just that we say the same things, Peter says, it's that we're on the same side.

But, of course, there was at least one occasion when it didn't seem that way; when in his letter to the Galatians Paul describes rebuking Peter for not eat with the Gentiles Christians. And people have taken that and argued that there was this big chasm between Peter and Paul and they were preaching two different Christianities.

And yet, the whole point of that dust up was that their theology, and their family - the one church of Jew and Gentile together - was the same. And Paul was calling Peter to live that out.

Some months back, I said something to Tom about what people thought about me, and he said, 'Hey, come on, you regularly preach about not basing your identity on what people think of you - but that's exactly what you're doing now. You need to listen to your own sermons.' And he was right. But did his calling me out mean we weren't brothers? Or that we preach a different gospel? No! It's the opposite. And Paul was that to Peter, encouraging him to live out the gospel in every area of life. We all need brothers and sisters like that.

So whether it's Peter or Paul, whether you're a Christian yet or not, these are days of salvation, these are days for living out the gospel, so count them like that.

But of course, the fact that Paul was a dear brother didn't mean everything he wrote was easy to understand! So… Be diligent, count, and thirdly…

Take Care

Verse 16, 'There are some things in them [Paul's letters] that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.' So, firstly, if you've ever read one of Paul's letters and it has taken mental effort to work out what he's saying, Peter's saying 'you are not alone!'

But to find something the Bible says hard to understand is not the same as twisting it. Or, to read some part of the Bible and think 'man I find this difficult to accept' or even 'I don't like this' is not the same as twisting it. To twist Scripture is to take what's written and make it mean something it doesn't mean, or to make it mean the opposite of what it clearly means. Not least when you want to make it agree with what you already think,

And when people do that, Peter says, they're doing it to their own destruction. Why?

Firstly, because the Bible's authoritative. You see, when Peter talks of 'the… Scriptures', he's using a technical word that the New Testament writers used for the Old Testament. And back in chapter 1, Peter said that the Old Testament was written as the writers, 'spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit' (2 Peter 1:21). So they're not just ancient writings full of wisdom, they're God's word.

And here, Peter groups Paul's letters with the Old Testament and says Paul wrote them, v15, 'with the wisdom *given him*' - in other words, God was speaking through Paul just like he has spoken through the Old Testament. And, of course, the church came to realise the same was true for Peter.

And so to read what *God* says, and then twist it so it says what you want it to say, is never a good idea, Peter says. Whether it's human sexuality, or the differences between men and women, or our attitude to money or personal freedom, God's word should have authority over you, not you over it., Peter is saying. The way you handle the Bible matters.

And so, secondly, it's not just authoritative, it's authoritative in the very areas that may be challenging you, or confronting you. Which is why you might want to try and make it say something different than it actually says. And when that has to do with sin, it puts that person on a dangerous, destructive trajectory.

Which is why Peter says, v17, '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.' In other words, you know this is how other people treat God's word, *but not you*. *You* are beloved by God, so love to hear his voice speaking to you from his word. Even the hard bits. Even the bits that challenge you. You are his beloved child, so what he writes is his best for you.

Now, after all this rain we've been having, the rivers are like torrents. And you've probably seen videos in the past of flood waters ripping up trees, carrying off cars, and destroying buildings. Well, that's the image Peter's using for people being carried away with error. And you probably know there is a long and sorry history of people abandoning the faith, or making the Bible say the opposite of what it says. And you probably experience at least something of that torrent of error, whether it's pressure from friends, or the teaching of some individual in or outside the church, or what you see on line. And Peter's saying, 'take care'. Don't say, 'oh that'll never happen to me.' Instead, climb onto the rock that's higher than the flood, that the torrent will never budge, and plant your feet on the authority of God's word, and be stable.

So… Be diligent, Count, Take Care and fourthly and finally…

Grow

Verse 18, 'But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' Now, Peter began this letter by saying, 'May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord' (1:2). So he begins with grace and he ends with grace - because while we're to be diligent, and count, and take care - if we do that out of anxiety, or fear, or guilt, we'll never do them, or if we do, we'll do them without joy.

But when you know that God is full of grace, and that far from him being some hard task master trying to ruin your lives, he is more kind and loving and merciful than you could ever imagine or

deserve, you'll want to be diligent, and count your days right, and take care. Because which child who knows his father loves him doesn't want to please his father?

You see, God's grace is not some abstract theological concept. Instead, Peter says we are to 'grow in the grace and knowledge *of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*' (v18). The grace that meant he was willing to give up his eternal security and comfort and enter our days so that they might become days for us of salvation, not condemnation. The grace that was willing to be the spotless and blameless sacrifice, to bear our sin and shame, so we might bear his righteousness. The grace that was willing to be carried away by the raging torrent of God's wrath against our sin so that we might stand safe on the rock.

Grow in your knowledge and experience of that grace, Peter says.

And as you do, v18, 'To him [to Jesus] be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.'

You see, the truth is we all spend our lives making something look glorious, something look big. It could be you, it could be your problems, or your grievances. It could be your stuff, or the climate, or politics. But each one of those misses the point. Eternity and the new heavens and the new earth, will be about making much of Jesus. And Peter's saying, as you wait for that day, start as you mean to go on.