

Youth Teaching Resources

December 6, 2020



Christmas Letters

2 Peter 3:1-15a (RCL 3:8-15)—“Patience and Peace”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24—“A Sanctified Season”

Romans 16:25-27—“A Christmas Benediction”

Galatians 4:4-7—“Children of the Child”

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Find links and videos related to this lesson.

“Patience and Peace”

2 Peter 3:1-15a (RCL 3:8-15)

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

This youth teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

Throughout the season of Advent, the social media challenge will be centered around the weekly themes of Advent.

On Sunday, post a picture of two purple candles that are lit. On Monday, post the word “Faith”. On Tuesday through Saturday, post images or phrases that reveal your faith.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Campaign Promises” from *Citizen Kane*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) What promises does he make?
- 2) Why didn’t he make promises before?
- 3) How do his promises get him elected?
- 4) What is the biggest promise that you have made? What was the biggest promise that you had made to you?
- 5) What does your faith promise to you?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading 2 Peter 3.1-15a. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony’s commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) When did the early followers of Jesus expect Jesus to return? How is it to read these letters knowing that Jesus has not returned?
- 2) Why would some people have suggested that Jesus would not return at all?
- 3) What does the author have to say about these arguments?
- 4) What is the difference between how God and humans view time?

Information *continued*

- 5) What should we be doing until Jesus' return? Why should we be doing these things?

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the "Digging Deeper" portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What does this text have to do with the season of Advent, faith, and preparedness?
- 2) Does it matter who wrote Peter? Explain.
- 3) What are the elements the writer of this passage meant?

You may also want your group to discuss "The Hardest Question" if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as "The Hardest Question": Who were the scoffers in 2 Peter?

Transformation

Conclude your time together by introducing the social media challenge for the week:

On Sunday, post a picture of two purple candles that are lit. On Monday, post the word "Faith". On Tuesday through Saturday, post images or phrases that reveal your faith.

Allow the students time to share things that encourage their faith.

Close with a prayer of faithfulness and keeping faith both in joy and sorrow.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

What about Advent?—This text has no apparent connection with Christmas, or with the Sunday that often focuses on peace, and yet the committee behind the Revised Common Lectionary chose it as one of the Advent texts. Why?

Although the author of 2 Peter lived long after the first advent of Jesus, he looked forward to his return at the “Parousia” as a second advent. As Israel had longed for the initial coming of Christ, so the early church anticipated a second appearing.

Whether we expect to meet Christ at “the Second Coming” or at our own “home-going,” we are also called to be patient and faithful as we anticipate our meeting with Christ and the hope of eternal peace.

Who wrote 2 Peter?—Most contemporary scholars are convinced that 2 Peter was not the work of the apostle, despite the claim in 1:1 that it was written by “Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ.” The writer’s references to 1 Peter and to Peter’s impending death give the impression that a later writer was trying a bit too hard to establish his credibility by writing in Peter’s name.

Ben Witherington III has argued that 2 Peter could not have been written either by the apostle or the author of 1 Peter, who is also unlikely to have been Simon Peter. In his contribution to the “Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians” series, Witherington wrote: “In terms of perspective, Greek style, theological content, language, dependency upon Jude and a host of other factors, 2 Peter is said to be a clear example of a New Testament text written under an assumed name (pseudepigraphon)” (*A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1–2 Peter* [InterVarsity Press, 2007], 260–61).

A primary argument, based on the text itself, is the reference to the death of “our ancestors” (3:4) in a way that seems to refer to the apostles, and the endorsement of a collection of Paul’s letters as scripture (3:15b-16). Peter probably died about 64 C.E., and Paul’s letters were unlikely to have been considered “scripture” before sometime in the second century. A third reason is that 2 Peter is clearly dependent on the book of Jude, which was almost certainly written late in the first century.

Yet another clue can be found in that the author “predicts” that scoffers would arise, as if Peter was anticipating what was to come (2:1-3a, 3:3-4), but then speaks of the skeptics in the present tense (2:10-16, 3:5), clearly describing a current situation.

It was not unusual for writers of the period to write in the name of famous apostles, and none were better known than Peter. Other pseudonymous books attributed to Peter didn’t make it into the Bible. These include works with names like the Acts of Peter, the Gospel of Peter, the Preaching of Peter, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Coptic Apocalypse of Peter, the

Digging Deeper *continued*

epistle of Peter to Phillip, and the Judgment of Peter.

For a recent comprehensive and accessible discussion of these matters in more detail, see Richard Vinson, “1 Peter” and Richard Wilson, “2 Peter,” in *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentaries (Smyth & Helwys, 2010), 1-26, 261-76.

Big words—My suggestion that “eschatological skepticism led to moral libertinism” is adapted from Richard J. Bauckham, who wrote: “The two features of the opponents’ teaching that dominate the author’s debate with them are eschatological skepticism (i.e., skepticism about things expected to occur at “the end”) and moral libertinism” (“2 Peter,” in *Harper’s Bible Commentary* (Harper & Row, 1988), 1286.

Parousia—The Greek term commonly associated with the return of Christ is *parousía*, which means “arrival” or “appearance.”

The “Elements”—The author wrote that “the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire . . .” (3:10). What does he mean by this? The statement is not to be understood as a prophetic preview of modern science’s prediction that six billion years from now the sun will morph into a red giant and engulf the earth within its fiery shell.

Like others of his age, the writer thought of the earth as being covered by a solid dome alternately called the “firmament” or “the heavens.” The sun, moon, and stars (“the elements”) were thought to follow fixed tracks within the dome. Although the author never doubted that God had the ability to perceive human activity despite its presence, his image of the heavens and the elements exploding and dissolving in fire emphasizes a day when nothing will stand between God and earth, so that “everything that is done on it will be disclosed.”

The author of 2 Peter is the only biblical writer to describe the end times in this way, and we should not presume this is exactly how it will be: he speaks in the language of metaphor.

How should we live?—In 3:11, the author poses an important question: since judgment is coming, “What sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness . . .?”

The author’s idea of what goes into a godly life can be found in 1:5-8, where he lists a chain of virtues that contribute to an effective Christian witness:

“For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love. For if these things are yours and are increasing among you, they keep you from being ineffective and unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Digging Deeper *continued*

Here's a story—Today's text is difficult enough to study, and even more difficult as a sermon text. In searching for a creative way to approach the text, I once keyed on the phrase "Where righteousness is at home." That led me to write a short story about a young woman who learned from her grandparents to love God, but strayed for a time before hearing a sermon based on 2 Peter 3:8-15 and turning back to God. It was later published as the first chapter in my book *Telling Stories: Tall Tales and Deep Truths* (Smyth & Helwys, 2008), pp. 9-18. It is entitled, appropriately enough, "The House Where Goodness Dwells." If you're interested and it's not in your church library, it can be ordered from helwys.com.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Who were the “scoffers” in 2 Peter?

The purpose of 2 Peter is mainly to counter the arguments of certain “false teachers” (2:1) or “scoffers” (3:3) who the author considered to be a major threat to the church. But who were these people?

Evidence is limited: all we know about them is what the writer says about them. They were not critics from outside the church, but a force from within: the author “predicts” that “there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions. They will even deny the Master who bought them – bringing swift destruction on themselves” (2:1). The writer describes them as being licentious people who malign the way of truth, greedily exploiting others with deceptive words (2:2-3).

It is obvious that such people were already present in the church, or the author would have had no need to condemn them, but he does so with great wrath, looking forward to their destruction. They “indulge their flesh in depraved lust” and “despise authority,” even as they “slander the glorious ones,” he says (2:10). Their presence got the writer so worked up that he described them as being “like irrational animals, mere creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed” (2:12). As willful persons who “revel in the daytime,” they are “blots and blemishes, reveling in their dissipation while they feast with you. They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin” (2:13-14a).

The greatest danger, though, is that “they entice unsteady souls” (2:14b), leading others to follow them in straying from the narrow road. Like waterless springs, they “speak bombastic nonsense, and with licentious desires of the flesh they entice people who have just escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for people are slaves to whatever masters them” (2:17-19).

Sadly, the false teachers had come to know Christ, but had become entangled again with “the defilements of the world” and as such their last state had become worse than the first (2:20).

We can probably assume that these are the same people the author confronts in 3:3, calling them “scoffers” who indulge in their own lust and who insist that the world will go on forever as it is without any fear of judgment.

Writers in the past often thought of these false teachers as adherents of a libertine form of Gnosticism. Gnostics taught that the only true life was in the spirit, and claimed to have secret knowledge of how one might ascend through various spiritual realms to become like God. In their view, the flesh was only a temporary home and basically evil, so it didn’t matter what one did with the body. There is evidence that some people taught

The Hardest Question *continued*

a Christianized form of Gnosticism, arguing that Christ had come to lead people to new spiritual heights that were unconnected from the body.

More recently, as Richard Wilson notes, writers have tended to favor Jerome H. Neyrey's conclusion that 2 Peter's rhetorical style matches other critics of the Epicurean philosophy. Epicurus was a Greek philosopher who was long dead (he lived from 341-270 B.C.E.), but his teachings remained popular, for obvious reasons. Epicurus' philosophy acknowledged the existence of gods but held that they had no interest in human life. Since death was the end, humans should be self-sufficient and find pleasure among friends while on earth. Living without fear of God or eternal retribution, people were free to indulge without restraint in a "no worries" lifestyle of pleasure.

Other opponents of Epicurianism, notably Lactantius (fourth century B.C.E.) and Plutarch (second century B.C.E), argued against the pleasure-based philosophy with the same sort of arguments that we find in 2 Peter. (For more on this, see Richard Wilson, "2 Peter," in *1 & 2 Peter, Jude* [Smyth & Helwys, 2010], 277-79).

One doesn't have to be a formal Epicurean, however, to be skeptical of religious matters and desirous of pleasure. Persons in every age have laughed at those who espouse religious ideals and anticipate an afterlife characterized by punishment or reward. It's quite possible to have no belief in God and still hold to moral virtues as a human good, but many follow the path of self-indulgence, whether they've ever heard of Epicurus or not.

It's worth asking ourselves if we practice self-restraint and moral uprightness only because we fear damnation if we don't. If so, our values are still topsy-turvy. True goodness and godliness do not grow from fear, but from love.