

Sermon: A Strategy for the Lord's Return

Text: II Peter 3:1-18 ESV

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May 29, 2022

Introduction: [II Peter 3:1-2 ESV](#) ¹This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles,

The opening verses ([vv. 1-2](#)) in chapter 3 serve as both an introduction to the material Peter wants to share and a repetition of what he has already told his readers even in his previous letter. Peter wants them to wake up to the importance of “wholesome thinking.” Plato used the phrase in the sense of “pure reason” that was uncontaminated by the seductive influence of the senses (s. Green, p.134).

The Apostle Peter insists that to protect oneself from a seductive world one needs to recall the O.T. prophets' words, those words of his, and the other apostles of Jesus. These words were Scripture and would help provide life in the midst of a distractive, dying world.

Why was Peter so keen on reminding the Church of her need to live holy, righteous lives? He wanted them to know about the Lord's return and how they should prepare. The Church needed a strategy for action. This plan required them to:

I. Be Aware of Scoffers ([vv. 3-7](#)).

[II Peter 3:3-7 ESV](#) ³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” ⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

A. Scoffers are coming.

1. They provide a bad moral example ([v. 3](#)).

One needs only to watch pop culture media, Hollywood icons, or popular musicians, many of whom have no shame, to see behavior who many try to emulate.

Been alotta bling bling but it ain't real
And alotta new kings but I won't kneel
Sittin' high on a mountain top, holdin' shop singin' the raw dog blues
Like in old Mississippi's dirty cotton fields
Or in Detroit City's unforgotten wheels
It's the same song spinning but the same song's always been true

And I'm gonna take my roll cuz I ain't got nothin' to lose
And I'm gonna save your soul if it's really what you want me to do

Get on your knees I'm your rock n roll Jesus
(This is like the Beatles' comment about being more popular than Jesus years ago)

“Anthropocentric (man-centered) hedonism (love of self) always mocks at the idea of ultimate standards and a final division between saved and lost.” - Green, p. 138

These scoffers, Peter talks about, say, “well, where is he? He said he was coming back soon, did I miss it?”

B. Scoffers have deliberately forgotten God's abilities.

1. creation (v.5)

The heavens and the earth were created out of water and by water with simply a word. God spoke everything into existence. Talk about power and authority!

A person can say that the world is stable and unchanging, going on like it always has, but they are not in touch with reality and the possibility of cataclysmic change.

2. past judgment on sinners (v. 6)

These scoffers (mockers) have convenient memories about how God has punished those in the past who led immoral lives and ignored His commands. Almighty God created the world with water and punished the world with water (Noahic flood) after they refused to repent and obey him. God is in complete control of everything He has created.

Listen to Jesus' words about himself, the Son of Man: **Matthew 24:37-39 ESV**

37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **38** For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, **39** and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

John Calvin said, “nature is not enough to support and maintain the world, but rather it contains the material for its own ruin whenever it pleases God.” - Green, pp. 141-142

God has issued past judgments on humanity, and there is the promise of:

3. future judgment on sinners (v. 7)

Future judgment is to be accompanied by fire. The concept of fire as punishment is as old as Sodom and Gomorrah. We find another example of this idea of God’s coming judgment in the O.T. **Nahum 1:5-6 ESV** ⁵ The mountains quake before him; the hills melt; the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it. ⁶ Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.

We see references about judgment in the intertestamental literature, the N.T., and even in contemporary literature and cartoons, but this is no laughing matter in reality. Hell will not be a place full of laughter or happiness, only pain and regret.

It is my firm belief that the word translated destruction should not give anyone the idea of annihilation, but of separation and the loss of contact with God and anything good, pure and holy for eternity.

God is always going:

4. to keep His word

God has a track record we can consult. If God says it, it will happen, and He will ultimately protect His people. **II Thessalonians 1:6-9 ESV** ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,

II. Be Patient with God’s Timing (vv. 8-9).

II Peter 3:8-9 ESV ⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

A. God’s timing is different (v. 8).

Verse 8 in our text is a quote from the Psalms. **Psalm 90:4 ESV** *4 For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.*

This is simply the psalmist's way of saying God has the big picture and long view of things in mind. This is NOT a literal statement, but a figure of speech (simile). It certainly is NOT the key to exactly unlocking when Jesus will come again.

The terminally-ill person knows that time is a gift, not to be taken for granted. Yet, we are all terminally ill, we just may not know when we will die.

“Faith orients man to eternity, whereas scoffers remain children of time.” - Barnett, quoted by Green, p. 147.

Peter has told the Church previously: **I Peter 4:7 ESV** *7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers (so that you can pray, NIV).*

This is the perspective we all need.

B. God wants everyone restored to Him (v. 9).

“Final doom is no more inevitable for our world than it was for Ninevah, if like the men of Ninevah, we humble ourselves and repent.” - Green, p. 145

Everything God has done, or will do, is to reestablish a relationship with His creation. He wants everyone to be saved no matter how unlikely some people's chances may seem to us. God wants to go back to the “good old days” before the Fall, before shame, sin and separation. He has done absolutely everything necessary to demonstrate his love and patience, and He awaits our response to His gracious invitation.

Peter has no credibility with a world full of scoffers. His message is for the Church:

III. Be Prepared for a Sudden Coming (vv. 10-12).

II Peter 3:10-12 ESV *10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies[a] will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.[b] 11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn!*

Footnotes: [a] 2 Peter 3:10 Or *elements*; also verse 12

[b] 2 Peter 3:10 Greek found; some manuscripts *will be burned up*

The scoffers were pointing out that nothing had happened like what had been promised, but “delay does not mean non-fulfillment.” - Green, p. 148

The fact is:

A. God will come like a thief (v. 10a).

The second and final coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be totally unexpected like a night-time visit from a burglar. It cannot be predicted with any certainty because Mark tells us that only the Father knows when Jesus will come back.

Mark 13:32-37 ESV ³²“But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Be on guard, keep awake.[a] For you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants[b] in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows,[c] or in the morning—³⁶lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

Footnotes:

[a] Mark 13:33 Some manuscripts add *and pray*

[b] Mark 13:34 Or *bondservants*

[c] Mark 13:35 That is, the third watch of the night, between midnight and 3 a.m.

The climax of history is coming, and we need to be ready.

B. Heaven and earth will be burned up and dissolved (vv. 10bc, 12).

The idea of fire here removes everything from the earth other than God and humanity. We are left in a courtroom scene where there can be no pretense. Everything man has accumulated or done has been taken off the table. The only thing left is one’s character and relationship with God. Hopefully before it is too late we all learn that people matter more than things.

And no matter what it seems, we will outlive the material world around us now!

So it is that Peter urges Christian brothers and sisters to:

C. Live holy and godly lives (v. 11).

You see if there is no final judgment, then why not live without restraints? But God says there will be a final accounting!

There is a close connection between conduct and conviction. Rather than living according to God's rules, man tries to reinterpret what God has said so he can do what he wants.

William Barclay says that disbelief in the second coming of our Lord leads man down a path of hedonism (living for self), apathy (no direction or reason to live one way or the other), and finally depression (why live at all). Without the truth, embodied in the second coming doctrine, that affirms life is going somewhere, there is nothing left to live for." - s. Green, p. 152

As Christians we have every reason to:

IV. Be Confident in the Future (vv. 13-16).

II Peter 3:13-16 ESV ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Final Words

¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. ¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

A. We have a promised reward (vv. 13-14).

1. new heaven and earth (home of righteousness)

The end of time as we know it now does not remove the earth and heavens, but renews them, and restores them to what they were meant to be: a place where righteousness dwells. The word translated "home" in v. 13 in the NIV is really a verb that NKJV and the ESV translate accurately as "dwells." The word has the idea of permanence. There will never be any more tent-dwelling for God's people, only mansions.

We have every reason to live with confidence about the future (no matter what happens).

2. providing we live responsibly for God

If we are living right, it will not matter when we die or when Jesus comes. The trouble is that too many are betting their lives and hoping it will not be today! But, what if it is, today?

We are to make every effort to imitate Christ. He was spotless and blameless, just the opposite of the false teachers who were blots and blemishes (2:13).

We can insure our future:

B. By making sound (healthy) decisions about teaching (vv. 15-16)

Don't believe everything you hear! Check it against God's Word. Study the Bible. Pray for the Spirit's help in understanding.

1. avoid ignorant and unstable people.

False teachers do not submit their actions to the scrutiny of Scripture, they make Scripture the justification for what they want to do. - (s. Green, p. 160)

You need to choose wisely to whom you listen:

2. so as not to follow those who will be separated from God eternally.

I Corinthians 15:33-34 ESV ³³ Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." [a] ³⁴ Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.

Footnotes: [a] 1 Corinthians 15:33 Probably from Menander's comedy *Thais*

We certainly do not want to fall from our secure position, become apostate, and shipwreck our faith. we need to be careful with what God has given us as a trust - the Word of God!

Conclusion: II Peter 3:17-18 ESV ¹⁷ You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care (*guard*, NIV) that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. ¹⁸ But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

There are words here that Peter wants us to emphasize. "Take care," the idea of guard in v. 17, as well as "grow" in v. 18 are imperatives. We are commanded to guard against being duped into believing falsehoods about salvation. We also must grow so we do not atrophy and spiritually die. Everything we do needs to glorify our God and enhance His reputation in the world. "The Christian life, it has been said, is like riding a bicycle. Unless you keep moving, you fall off!" - Green, p. 163

We need to be careful in this world we are not seduced into believing a lie by the Deceiver, the Devil, and his army of followers. We need to be intentional about growing in our relationship with our Lord, and finally we need to praise and glorify our Lord with our deeds and words because He alone can save us (and others) from the certain and coming Judgment.