

## **“Stirred Up”**

### **II Peter 3:1-8**

Have you even been a part of a group that was stirred up? That can mean a lot of different things. Stirred up could mean excited or angry. It could mean happy or frustrated. A stirred up group of people could be a party, or it could be a mob.

Sometimes Christians get stirred up about things that we should not get stirred up about, things that have nothing to do with the Kingdom of God.

And often those things which Christians should be stirred up about we are cold and apathetic toward.

As we are going to see in verse 1 from our text, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle Peter to write his epistles to stir up Christians. This passage in particular is stirring up Christians to stand against scoffers who mock the doctrine of the Lord's return.

I'm going to use three short phrases found in this text as the three main points for this sermon. The first is found in verse 2, “Be Mindful,” the second is in verse 3, “Know this first,” and finally in verse 8, “Be not ignorant.” The instruction we find in these verses is given to stir up Christians, that we would be firmly established in our faith and prepared to stand for Christ.

## **I. Be Mindful (v. 1-2)**

Verse 1 tells us that the epistles of Peter were written to stir up the minds of believers. Peter writes here in verse 1, “I stir up your pure minds.” The people of God are a people of pure minds. If you look up this word “pure” in a Greek dictionary, you will find that it literally means “judged by sunlight.” I’ve heard that this term was originally used to describe good-quality pottery. In the ancient world when someone bought a pot or a vase they would hold it up to the sun and the sunlight would reveal any weak points or cracks. If a vessel passed this examination, it was said to be “pure,” judged by the sunlight, sincere, and free from fault.

The only other place this word is used in the New Testament in Philippians 1:10 where Paul tells the Philippians he prays for them, “That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be *sincere* and without offense till the day of Christ.” Sincere: it is the same word that is used in our text.

This purity of mind is in contrast to our position before Christ. Ephesians 4:17b-18a says, “Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened.” In Christ we have light. Our minds have been tested by the Son of Righteousness. Our minds have been purified from fleshly and selfish pursuits. We must be careful that we do not waste this gift from God.

Again, Peter says in this verse, “I stir up your pure minds.” There are times when we, as Christians, need to be stirred up. We naturally tend toward apathy. If we are not receiving admonition from the Word of God and from our brothers and sisters in the church, we grow cold. It takes tremendous effort to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. We need to be stirred up.

Have you ever had a bonfire? If you light a big pile of logs on fire, they might burn brightly for a time, but eventually they will burn down until they are just smoldering. They are still burning, but burning slowly and the light is dim. How can you get them to burn brightly once again? You stir them up. In the same way, we need to be stirred up.

This is one reason why it is so important to be an active member of a church body. God has ordained the church for the good of His people. One of the ministries of the church body is to stir up the members. As we interact with one another, as we gather around the Word of God, as we sit under the teaching and preaching of the Word of God, we are stirred up for Christian living.

Verse 1 ends by saying, “I stir up your pure minds *by way of remembrance.*” Peter stirs up the pure minds of believers in his two epistles by reminding us. Reminding us of what? Reminding us of the Word of God.

We must be mindful of the Word of God. Look at verse 2 (read verse). This encompasses both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament was given by

God through the holy prophets. The New Testament was given to us through the apostles of Jesus Christ. You cannot separate the Old from the New, it is one story that unfolds the grace of God.

Peter doesn't say, "Be mindful only of the writings of the apostle Paul."

Peter doesn't say, "Be mindful of only the red letters in your Bible, as the words of Jesus Himself."

Peter doesn't say, "Be mindful of the words of just the apostles, the words of the prophets don't matter any more."

No. None of those things.

We are to be mindful of all the Word of God. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16). Don't neglect the means God has ordained to accomplish His will in your life. One of the primary means God has ordained to accomplish His will in your life is His Word. Be mindful of the word of God.

When the apostle Peter wanted to stir up Christians for a life of zeal and holiness, he called upon them to give heed to the Word of God. We are not told to be mindful of feelings, or emotions, or "leadings," or programs, or committees. We are told to be mindful of the Word of God.

The Word of God is not just a book. It is not just ink on pages. It is the Word of God, inspired and preserved for us. And if you, as a Christian, spend time in the

Word of God (reading, studying, and meditating upon it), and you give heed to what it says, it will stir you up to a life of holiness and service for the Lord.

Matthew Henry commented on this verse, “What God has spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament, and Christ has commanded by the apostles of the New, cannot but demand and deserve to be frequently remembered; and those who meditate on these things will feel the quickening virtues thereof. It is by these things the pure minds of Christians are to be stirred up, that they may be active and lively in the work of holiness, and zealous and unwearied in the way to heaven.”

Be mindful of the Word of God. It will stir you up to do the work of God. Next, we are told: “Know this first.”

## **II. Know this First (v. 3-7)**

Verse 3 begins with those three words: “Knowing this first.” These words call our attention to what this passage teaches. The topic that Peter is about to address is of preeminent importance. What is this issue that is so important that the apostle Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, would introduce it with these words, “Knowing this first”?

Verse 3 continues: “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers.” This is a warning for today. The “last days” is not some mysterious

period of time which is yet to come. We are living in the last days. We have been living in the last days since Christ ascended up into heaven.

The apostle Peter referred to his time as the “last days” in his sermon in Acts 2 (v. 17).

Hebrews 1:2 refers to the time of writing as the “last days.”

In I Peter 1:20, Peter says that Christ has been “manifest in these last times for you.”

I John 2:18 begins, “Little children, it is the last time.”

These are the last days, and we must heed this warning given by the apostle Peter. Peter warns us that in these last days there will be scoffers.

Verses 3 and 4 describe these scoffers. This word “scoffers” is another interesting word. It is only used one other place in the Bible, in Jude verse 18, which is a parallel passage to this in many ways. Peter has been talking about false teachers, and false teachers could certainly be scoffers, but scoffers seem to be a much more broad category. False teachers are particularly people who are in the church, or claim to be in the church, and are teaching a false gospel. Scoffers, as we will see, are all those who make a mockery of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The first description this passage gives us of scoffers is that they walk “after their own lusts.” Like the false teachers described in chapter 2, scoffers are driven by their lusts. You will never find a man given over to lust who walks before it. Who leads his lusts, Who directs his lust into the path where he wants to go.

A man given over to the lusts of the flesh walks after his lusts. He is led about like a brute beast on a chain. He is no better than the animals who have no ability to reason and are governed only by the desires of their flesh. Don't be deceived: you cannot make lust your servant. Lust will never serve you. You will always serve lust.

This description of scoffers reveals a pattern. Like the false teachers in chapter 2 and scoffers here in chapter 3, they who refuse to bend the knee to God and serve Him, are not free. They serve another master, a cruel master. A master who offers no fulfillment, no grace, no hope. If you will not serve God, you will serve your lusts, and lust will consume you until you are destroyed. Who will be your master? "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

Verse 4 tells us that these scoffers will attack the promise of the Lord's return. At the beginning of verse 4 we are told that the scoffers will say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" As Christians, we have the tremendous hope of the Lord's return. He is coming back, and when he returns it will be the final fulfillment of all the promises He has made to us, His people. The Lord's return is a doctrine of hope. It will be a day of great joy and rejoicing for the people of God when Jesus Christ comes again.

But for the lost and unbelieving, the Lord's return is a fearful thing. When Jesus returns He is coming as judge. There will be a final judgment and the wicked and unbelieving will suffer the wrath of God for eternity.

This is the doctrine these scoffers attack. They attack the Lord's return because His return means their judgment. They cannot bear the thought of the judgment of God actually coming upon them, and so they mock this promise of God.

Verse 4 goes on to tell us how they will attack the promise of the Lord's return. Verse 4 says, "For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." These scoffers will argue that the promise is old, yet there is no sign that it is getting any closer to fulfillment. They will appeal to the natural world and argue that nothing has changed from the very beginning, therefore nothing ever will change. They look no further than the natural world to explain all that is and all that ever will be. They are uniformitarians, and argue that natural laws govern all things and have acted in a uniform way since the very beginning of the universe. Because they believe nothing has ever interrupted these natural laws, it is reasonable for them to believe that nothing ever will. This line of reasoning emboldens them as they mock the promises of God. Like the religious leaders who mocked Christ as He hung upon the cross and said, "Show us a sign," so these scoffers mock God, asking for a sign while ignoring the revelation which God has already given them in nature, in conscience, and in His Word.

One commentator said, "Presumptuous skepticism and lawless lust, setting nature and its so-called laws above the God of nature and revelation, and arguing



from the past continuity of nature's [laws] that there can be no future interruption to them, was the sin of the [people in Noah's day], and shall be that of the scoffers in the last days."<sup>1</sup>

Verses 5, 6, and 7 powerfully refute the naturalistic argument used by the scoffers. Verse 5 begins by calling these scoffers "willingly ignorant." They do not know better because they do not want to know better. They are ignorant, because they are willing to be ignorant. Like the Pharaoh in Egypt, they have hardened their heart. They are not ignorant by fate and circumstance, but by an act of their will.

Make no mistake, ignorance does not make a person innocent before God. Willful ignorance is a sin, and one sin can not excuse another.

The first example that this passage gives to refute the naturalistic argument of the scoffer is creation. Verse 5 reminds us that God created the universe. God created the universe. He created the natural laws that govern this universe, but He did not create through those natural laws.

Again, the universe does not have a natural origin. The origin of the universe is supernatural. It was created by God. He exists outside of nature. He is the Creator. He is not a part of His Creation. Genesis 1:1 describes the supernatural origin of the natural world: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

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<sup>1</sup> JFB Commentary on verse 4.

How did God accomplish this act of creation? Through His Word. Again, verse 5 says, “By the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water.”

It was not a fortunate collision of energy that created the universe. God created the world through His spoken Word. It is no coincidence that the Biblical account of creation is under assault. Because men don't want God to rule over them, they cannot acknowledge that God created them. They look at the complexity of creation and, in willful ignorance, they say, “It must have just happened. Natural processes must have brought this incredible complexity into existence over vast periods of time.” They don't want to acknowledge the truth, so they close their minds to the revelation of God in His creation.

The Biblical account of creation is a foundational doctrine. If you will not believe what the Bible says about creation, you cannot be consistent and also believe what the Bible says about redemption. Don't be like these scoffers who are willfully ignorant of the supernatural origins of this world.

Contrary to what popular culture would want you to believe, this is not an anti-science position. Knowing that the universe is not the result of chaos, but was created by all all-knowing, all-powerful God gives us confidence and motivation as we pursue an understanding of the natural world.

Verse 5 also tells us that God created the earth “standing out of the water and in the water.” As we see in verse 6, God later used this water to destroy the earth.

Water sustains life on earth, yet it pleased God to use water to destroy life on earth. Calvin commented, “It hence appears that the power of nature is not sufficient to sustain and preserve the world, but that on the contrary it contains the very element of its own ruin, when-ever it may please God to destroy it.” God is not bound by the natural world. The natural world is bound by the will of God.

The second example this passage gives to refute the naturalistic argument of the scoffer is the global flood in the time of Noah. Verse 6 says, “Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.” The flood as recorded in Genesis 7 demonstrates that nature is governed by God. He created the world. The world is sustained by His will, and by His will, it can be destroyed.

This serves as a powerful reminder for us: Don’t put your faith in the things of this world. Even the natural laws which govern this creation are passing away. Put your faith in the God who by His word created the world and Who has demonstrated that it is in His power to destroy the world.

These two examples, creation and the flood, serve to refute the argument of the scoffers who say that “all things continue as they were from the beginning.” That is simply not true. Not all is as it has always been. God is the Creator and He has the power and authority to cause the course of this world to deviate from what you and I would call normal or natural.

Verse 7 closes this section with a warning about future judgment (read verse 7). Look closely at what verse 7 actually says: “The heavens and the earth, which

are now.” This is talking about the world post-flood. The world as you and I know it today.

“By the same word are kept in store.” The natural world is kept in store, it is laid up, it is reserved. The natural world works and behaves according to the natural laws God has ordained to order His creation, but these natural laws are not the force which sustains the universe. The world is kept in store by the word of God.

To what end? Verse 7 tells us that this world is “kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”

God once judged the world with water, but the final judgment will be with fire. Take a few moments to compare these two judgments.

The flood is in the past, but the fire is still to come. The flood was a terrible judgment that is in the past and we look back upon, but it does not concern us. None of us will die in a global flood. God will never judge the earth with water again (Genesis 9:11). But the fire which is to come is a terrible judgment still in the future, and should very much concern us. When the fire comes, all of creation will be consumed. There will be no escaping this fiery judgment.

The flood came relatively slowly, but the fire will consume suddenly. The rain fell for 40 days before the earth was flooded, but the fire will come suddenly and all will be destroyed.

The flood did not destroy everything, but the fire will consume all of creation. In some ways the flood shows the mercy of God as much as the judgment of God. God destroyed everything that had breath upon the earth, but He also provided an ark. Not everything was destroyed. Noah and his family were spared. The animals on the ark were spared. The earth, though ravaged by the flood, didn't cease to exist. Eventually the waters receded and Noah and his family and the animals were able to leave the ark and repopulate the earth. You and I are here today as a result of the mercy God showed to Noah.

But the judgment of fire will be the final and all-consuming judgment of God upon the wicked. Verse 10 describes the total destruction of this judgment, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

No giant boat will be able to preserve life in this judgment of fire. No bunker deep in the earth will save any man as the elements melt away. No spaceship in the far reaches of the universe can survive when the heavens themselves will pass away. All will be destroyed, and there is nothing we can do to escape this coming judgment.

Again, there is nothing we can do, but something has been done for us. An Ark has been prepared. A way of escape from the final fiery judgment. Jesus Christ is God's provision for us. He is the only way of escape. He is the only deliverance

from the destruction. Flee from your sin; flee to Jesus Christ. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

This is an incredible passage that teaches us so much about the nature of man and the nature of God, of God’s judgment and God’s mercy, of man’s pride and God’s power. All these things and so much more. But remember, Peter is writing this to believers to warn them about a real and present danger, and to stir them up to stand firm for Christ.

In verse 8 we are told: “Be not ignorant.”

### **III. Be not Ignorant (v. 8)**

By repeating the word “beloved” in the first part of verse 8, Peter shows that he is again turning his attention to the Christians he is writing to. Verses 5, 6, and 7 were refuting the scoffers. Now the apostle says, “Beloved.” You, Christian, beloved by God.

Verse 8 continues and says, “Be not ignorant.” Contrast this with the scoffers who are described in verse 5 as “willingly” ignorant. They don’t want the truth. They close their eyes and harden their hearts to the revelation of God. But you, Christian, heed the command from the Word of God and “be not ignorant.”

“Be not ignorant of this one thing.” If we learn, consider, and remember this one thing, it will put our minds at ease and keep our faith in the promise of the Lord’s return. And what is it? What is this one thing that we must not be ignorant of?

The second half of verse 8 says, “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Dwell upon the eternity of God, and questions about days fade into insignificance. This verse isn’t providing a formula for us to try to use to interpret how days are used throughout the Bible. This is simply a reminder that the eternal God isn’t pressured by the constraints of time like you and I.

As we wait with eager anticipation for the Lord’s return, it seems long in coming because our lives are short, and fading away like a vapor. We are obsessed with counting the days and the hours and the minutes as they tick by and we are powerless to slow their march or speed them along. But the eternal God has no such pressure. He exists in eternity, outside the constraints of time.

The promise of the Lord’s return doesn’t depend on the passing of time. It is not as if the God is in heaven, watching a clock, waiting for enough time to pass so Jesus can return. The Lord’s return doesn’t hinge upon the passing of time here on earth. The Lord’s return may very well *relate* to the passing of time here on earth, but that’s not the deciding issue.

The Lord's return depends upon the hidden purposes of God. It is enough for us, as people of faith, to rest in the promise of God. He has said He will return. Our hope isn't based on how quickly He keeps that promise. We have hope because this is a promise from the eternal God, and He will not fail to keep His Word.

Do not let your faith be shaken by those who scoff because it seems to us that God is long in keeping His promise. God is eternal. Time has no hold upon Him. We can rest with great peace and assurance when we consider the eternity of God.

From our text this morning we have been reminded to be mindful of the Word of God. To know this first, that in the last days there will be scoffers who mock the doctrine of the Lord's return. And to be not ignorant of the eternity of God. To what end has this instruction been inspired and preserved for us? To stir us up, that we would be firmly established in our faith and prepared to stand for Christ.