

We Wait: According to His Promises

2 Peter 3

Pastor Tim Nixon

A man was working in his backyard one day, when his neighbor began talking to him over the fence. He said, "Yeah, my wife and I went to one of those seminars yesterday, you know, where they teach you ways to improve your memory and such."

His neighbor commented, "Really. What was the name of the speaker?"

The man answered, "Ah, ah, what's the name of that flower that smells so good and has thorns?"

"You mean a rose?"

"Yeah, that's it." He called over his shoulder, "Rose, what was the name of that speaker we heard yesterday?"

We humans often have a hard time remembering things. I've probably said at least one of the following about myself, I just can't remember which.

- My memory has gotten so bad I figure that within a few years I'll be able to hide my own Easter eggs.
- I have a good memory. The problem is my forgettery is even better.
- I have a great memory. It's just short.

And so here we are in second Peter chapter 3 completing our series this morning.

You will remember in chapter 1 that Peter urged his readers to remember. Remember or remembrance was a theme repeated throughout that chapter.

Then in chapter 2 we saw a description of and warning of false teachers.

People generally familiar with the Bible normally think false teachers when they think of second Peter. But chapter 3 helps us remember that the letter was not written to false teachers; it was written to Christians.

After chapter 2, it is easy to lose sight of this larger purpose, because Peter devotes the entire chapter to the description of false teachers, their error, and God's condemnation of them.

But all that changes in chapter 3, where Peter addresses his readers directly again as beloved.

Chapter 3 bears a close resemblance to chapter 1.

- In chapter 1 the church was admonished to refresh your memory, and first of all to understand.
- In chapter 3 Paul writes this to remind them to stir up their minds so that they may first of all, understand.

Peter uses the same wording in chapter 3 as he did in chapter 1 to let his readers know that he's coming back to his earlier context and earlier emphasis.

In the first seven verses of this chapter, we see an interesting outline:

- in verses one and two Peter urges his readers to *remember* the truth.
- In verses three and four Peter warns of scoffers.
- In verses five through seven Peter rebukes the scoffers for *forgetting* the truth.

As in chapter 1 the idea of remembering frames these verses. Peter's writing is intended to stir up their minds by way of reminder. This naturally raises the question, reminder of what?

Peter answers the question in verse two where he explains that there are two sources from which they should remember and put into action the truth:

- The Old Testament promote prophetic writers
- And the writings of the apostles, what will become the New Testament.

At the beginning of this text, Peter essentially notes that believers need their minds engaged in the words made known in the Scripture and from Jesus and his Apostles. Here he promoted the need to identify the proper source of truth.

In an internet age where we "Google" anything we don't know, this warning is even more necessary. The source of truth is not irrelevant, since most things we read on the Internet, listen to on the radio, or see on TV represent someone's carefully crafted opinion more than truth.

Now in verses three through seven Peter has to face the key question of his letter. Was Jesus wrong to promise that he would return in power? And certainly the question is still asked after 2000 years.

We see in verse three why the remembrance and the reminders that Peter has been bringing to their minds are so urgently needed.

The false teachers are mocking the idea of Christ's return in glory.

Here we see the second of the most important issues in this letter:

- the false teachers skepticism about the return of Christ,
- and their disdain for holiness from chapter 2

First of all scoffers will come. Here Peter doesn't mean that there will be second and third reasons or issues. He is saying this is "above all." What he is about to say is of overwhelming importance.

When Peter says that in the last days they will come, he is not speaking of the distant future. By the time Jude writes his letter they have come. Peter knows he is writing in the last days. This is standard New Testament shorthand for the period between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ; the time in which Peter is now living.

The idea of a judgement has become a laughing matter.

Peter said people will walk away from truth for one reason: they want to do what they want to do. Lies will be planted, nurtured and eventually widely assumed. And especially in our culture, a culture shaped to believe that everyone should get a prize so that no one feels badly, where does Divine judgment fit it?

It doesn't – and that point shouldn't be overlooked. A tailor-made morality will slowly replace the truth, and make judgment seem, not only unlikely, but entirely indefensible as part of the Christian message.

It is clear from verse four that this question is not an innocent request for information about the nature of Jesus' return. In asking where this coming was, the false teachers are implying that it was past due and that it was therefore not going to happen at all. The coming of Christ was promised before the death of the fathers. Well, the fathers have died and *still* nothing happens.

Peter responds to the flaw in their reasoning in verses 5-7. Everything does not always go on without change.

On the contrary, God has intervened spectacularly in the course of human history:

- having created the world through water and his word (v5)
- by the same water and word also destroying the world in the flood of Noah's day (v6)
- and God will do the same again to the earth only this time he will use fire (7)

The fact that we do not see God actively judging his world is not a sign of his weakness. He is absolutely in control, and his powerful word, being employed in that creation, is reserved and being kept for its final judgment.

In verses 8-10 we see God's patience displayed.

Now that Peter has highlighted the weakness of their reasoning and virtually knocked down their straw man, he returns to the question in verse four, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

There is something that must be kept in mind when thinking of the coming of Christ. The nature of God is different than that of men. Time and eternity are two different entities, and since God is eternal and man finite, they look at time in different ways.

Verse eight is a quote from Psalm 90:4 where man is pictured as "numbering his days" while God is "from everlasting to everlasting." Thus "time" and "delay" are virtually meaningless to God, and man must learn to adjust to that.

In fact, verse 9 makes it clear that the delay is proof that God is trustworthy in fulfilling his promises. It is not faithlessness or even slowness which delays the coming of the end, but patience.

Commentator Richard Bauckham writes, "patience is that quality by which God bears with sinners, holds back his wrath, refrains from intervening in judgment as soon as the sinners deeds deserve it, though not indefinitely."

Based on these preceding arguments, Peter confidently asserts that the day of the Lord **will** come.

No matter what the false teachers may claim, the evidence against them is overwhelming.

The day of the Lord is the extraordinary and miraculous intervention of God near the end of human history where he judges the earth and pours his wrath out upon it. The Old Testament prophets viewed the final day of the Lord as a day of unparalleled judgment, darkness, and a day in which God would completely destroy his enemies and vindicate his name and his glory. Peter describes it as arriving like a thief, meaning that it will be unexpected, without warning, and disastrous for the unprepared.

In Peter's day, and at our time in history, the mockers may ridicule and scoff. But their insults are only short-lived. One day, Christ will return and God's judgment will be displayed, a fact that is guaranteed by his promise and his power.

Don't be discouraged the Jesus has not yet come back. This creates opportunity for us, because God still has people to save.

And so knowing this, how should we live? Look with me at verses 11-16.

The coming, translates to the familiar term Parousia, which simply means "the presence." Since we are to be waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of the Lord, such anticipation precludes being worried about it or afraid of it. In Titus Paul wrote joyfully, "looking for the blessed hope in the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Christ Jesus" in reference to this appearing.

And while we see the terrible description of God's judgment, verse 13 reminds us that it is in line with God's salvation promise.

Isaiah 65:17 reads, "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind."

Peter reminds us of Isaiah 65 yet with the whole freshness.

- In chapter 1 he reminds us that we will escape the corruption of the world caused by evil desires as we look forward to the rich will come from Jesus Christ.
- In chapter 2 he reminds us against the background of judgment on sin, that God rescues the righteous.
- Now Peter's final, wonderful truth becomes clear. We are going to have a new home, home of righteousness. We are to be looking forward to this brand-new heaven and earth and to begin to live a life now that shows how much we are getting ready for it.

We don't need more evidence. We don't need more revelation. We don't need more Scripture. We should be transformed because of what we already have.

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

Peters link back to the Old Testament and back to previous point in his letter is unavoidable. In the Old Testament to be blameless was a requirement of both sacrificial animals and the sacrificing priesthood. Anything that was devoted to God was to be absolutely perfect.

And the false teachers had been described by Peter in chapter 2 as the opposite, he called them blots and blemishes.

Peter is reminding them, and us, to contrast ourselves with those who face God's judgment, to distance ourselves from them and to be is unlike them as possible.

They will have no place in the new heavens and the new earth, for they are unrighteous.

When Peter uses the word peace in verse 14 it could mean many things, but in this context, it refers to the true peace of mind that accompanies a confident faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- It is a peace that surpasses all understanding.
- It is a peace that comes from knowing for certain that my sins are forgiven.
- No matter how terrible the earth becomes, I have a settled confidence in this truth and thus have peace.

Peter wants his readers to wait eagerly for Christ return, but at the same time not grow idol and detach themselves from society. They should not be so consumed with thoughts of the future that they forget about their compelling spiritual responsibilities in the present.

Peter graciously speaks of his fellow apostle as our beloved brother Paul, underscoring their common life and mission. Peter makes it clear here that Paul's letters are inspired, calling them Scripture, and reminding to reject false teachers and remember what Paul wrote to them.

And so we have reached the other end of the bookshelf has Peter repeats that we are to "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."

- Be patient in your waiting for Jesus' return. After all, He is.
- Do not hold too tightly onto what will evaporate under the fiery wrath of God...
- Be warned that ignorant and unstable people will try to suck you into their distortions of the Scripture. Careful, you may be hitching your wagon to the downward slide into destruction.

Teaching on this passage Pastor Russ wrote, "The call here is for progress, for forward movement. Even more, the word growth also implies an enlarged capacity. You have a responsibility with the grace you have been given and the knowledge you have acquired to increase your capacity for both. The more you use the enabling grace you are receive the

more grace you are able to receive. The more you know Jesus (not just know about Him) the greater your capacity to know more. Small souled Christians have small capacities. May you become a large souled Christian just bursting at the seams with enabling grace and sweet with the rich fragrance of personal experience with Christ.”