

While We Wait

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The Lord is patient, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.

Many of us can be rather impatient and impulsive at times, perhaps proven best by the prevalence of fast food restaurants in the United States. Impatience and impulsiveness are also why we find it so difficult to diet and exercise regularly. We know how we want to look and feel, but we are too impatient to give our dieting and exercising the necessary time to see results. We don't see a difference quickly enough, so we yield to our impulses to eat and we sleep in instead of going to the gym. While impatience and impulsiveness can significantly affect our daily lives, they can also carry over into our faith.

? In what areas of your life can you struggle with impatience and impulsiveness?

Voices from the Church

"Unfortunately, many people think that patience is most predominately demonstrated by someone who has an easy going, laid-back attitude. But, on the contrary, patience is not some passive nuance of someone's character; it is an active, exhibited virtue. It is a virtue of trust. To exercise trust implies that we are trusting in someone greater than ourselves. It is no wonder the world is so impatient. Those who do not know God can only trust in themselves, for there is no one greater in whom they can place their trust."¹

—Burk Parsons

Like Jude, 2 Peter was written to encourage believers who were living with false teachers in their midst. These false teachers were leading some of the church away from the gospel and were confusing others, so Peter wrote to the church to encourage them to live faithfully and patiently. In this session, we will see that part of combating false teachings is remembering the commands of the prophets and apostles—God’s words to His people. We will also see that God works on His own timetable, not ours, and that what seems like slowness to us is actually God’s perfect timing. Because of this, the church is to be holy and godly as we anticipate the return of Christ, knowing that it will happen suddenly at just the right time, whether that is today, tomorrow, or one day a long time from now.

1. Remember the prophets’ words and the apostles’ commands (2 Pet. 3:1-7).

¹ This 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, 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.

Because the church was undergoing persecution for their faith in Jesus, Peter wanted to write to them to confirm and solidify further the truth that Jesus was returning—a message of great hope the church needed to embrace. Peter had heard Jesus say, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3). Perhaps with these words reverberating through the corridors of his mind, Peter wrote to the church to etch this vital doctrine of Christ’s return on the marble of their minds as well.

Peter wrote to tell the church what they already knew for their own good. Peter saw himself as yet another link in a chain that had begun long ago. What he was reminding the church of was previously spoken by the holy prophets and was the command of Jesus passed on to them through the apostles.

Through Peter's reminder appealing to the prophets and apostles, we too are reminded that all of the Bible tells one story of God's plan to redeem people through Jesus. Each voice in the Old Testament and New Testament is a member of one choir singing the same beautiful chorus of the gospel.



How should knowing the Bible is one story shape the way we share Jesus with others?

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

95. *Second Coming*

The Bible is clear that one day Christ will return in bodily form (Matt. 24–25). The imminent return of Christ is the hope of every Christian, knowing that when Christ returns, all things will be made new. While many have speculated as to when Christ's return will take place, Scripture gives no timeline as to when it will occur, only assuring that it will be unexpected (Matt. 25:8–10) and glorious (Matt. 24:30).

Peter shared why it is so important to remember the words and commands of Christ in verses 3–4, when he reminded the church that scoffers would come in the last days. Scoffers mock and belittle others, and in this case, they were giving the church grief about Christ's return. They considered the apparent delay of the return of Jesus as evidence that He was not coming.

These scoffers were like the people in the days of Noah who did not really believe a flood was coming to destroy every living creature on the earth. They lived with no urgency about the coming judgment; they married, produced children, and socialized like normal. They ate, drank, and were merry because they did not expect the flood to come.

But Peter exposes the fallacy of the scoffers' taunts in verses 5-7. God eventually released the waters of judgment, and every living creature outside the ark perished. What God spoke through Noah, His righteous spokesman, was fulfilled, but not before giving one hundred years for the people to repent of their scoffing. They refused to repent, however, and deliberately ignored the Creator who had separated the waters with a spoken command. And then it was too late. God released those waters in an act of uncreation, and judgment came.

Peter's admonition is clear—God keeps His promises. He will keep His promise to preserve and protect His own, and He will also keep His promise to bring judgment on those who rebel against Him. In Noah's day, it was judgment through water, but one day—today, tomorrow, or distant future—His judgment will come through fire. Believers can be sure the Day of the Lord will come as promised. And on that day, Jesus will return for His own, and He will bring judgment against all the ungodly, including the scoffers and false teachers. Christ's words will be proven true, and their words will be proven to be lies. The Day of the Lord *will* come.



How should thinking of Christ's return change the way we live?

2. Recognize the Lord's timetable differs from ours (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

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.

Having reminded the church of the reality of the coming Day of the Lord, Peter anticipates a question from the suffering church: "But when? Why is it taking Him so long? We are hurting! Doesn't He care?"

Peter's response is God does not work in time as we might want or expect. God's promises are not governed by us and cannot be determined by a calendar. God is not rushed; He always works in His perfect timing.

It has been about two thousand years since the Lord promised His return. He has not come back to earth yet, but He will. God is faithful. Every promise He has made, He *has* fulfilled or *will* fulfill. Titus 1:2 says God cannot lie. We can trust Him completely, even when we cannot see what He is doing and when we struggle with His timing.

We need to take to heart the same message Peter shared with the church in his day. We also need to remember that God's math is not our math as we trust Him with the resources He has given to us and live patiently and faithfully in His timing, not our own.



How have you seen God work in unexpected ways or in perfect timing in the Bible or in your own life?

God fulfills His promises not based on what we do but on who He is. The return of Jesus is not hanging in the balance waiting to be determined by our actions. Just as God promised the coming of our Lord during the first advent and fulfilled it, so He promises the coming of our Lord during the second advent and He will fulfill it too. Great is His faithfulness! God's promises are secured by His character. We know He will keep His promises because He is true, but we also know that His character drives how and when He fulfills His promises as well.

Voices from the Church

"People who don't believe in God consider time an adversary. For them, the ticking of the second hand sounds like the stalking of an enemy. Each minute moves them toward death. And everyone, whether rich or poor, tries to grab the hour hand to shove it backward."²

—Joni Eareckson Tada

The reason Peter offers for God’s “slowness” in the return of Jesus is the deliverance of others. While the church may feel as if God is letting them down, God has the benefit of someone else in mind as He patiently waits for the right time for Jesus to return.

God is “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” Peter wants the church to see God’s love and grace speaking into His timing to send Jesus back to earth. What the church might see as a delay is God’s gift of grace giving others time to repent of their sins and turn to Christ for saving faith.

Peter’s response rings just as true today. God is not slow about His promises, but He desires for all people to be saved. It is only because of God’s kindness that Jesus’ return was delayed for *us* to respond to the gospel. As recipients of such love and grace, we should look at each day we wake up without Jesus’ return not as a failing by God but as an opportunity from Him—an opportunity to be on mission sharing the gospel with those who still have time to repent.



How have you seen God being patient with you, either in coming to salvation or growing as a disciple?

3. Embrace a life of holy and godly anticipation for Jesus’ return (2 Pet. 3:10-13).

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 will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

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! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Peter uses the metaphor of a thief to illustrate the timing of Christ's return. No thief notifies the homeowner of a house he intends to rob when he is coming. This is why we lock our doors, because we never know when a thief might show up. We always need to be ready.

In a similar way, Christ's return will not be announced ahead of time. Jesus said no one knows the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come (Matt. 24:36). This is why we always need to be ready for it. *Today* could be the day.

But before Peter explains more about how we are to live in preparation for Christ's return, he wants to be sure the church understands that while Jesus' return is not known now, when it occurs it will be known by all. It will not be a mystery when it happens. No one will miss it (2 Pet. 3:10).



What are some ways we can prepare ourselves for the second coming of Christ and be ready each day as the possible day of His return?

Because Jesus' return will be marked by the passing away of the present heavens and earth, Peter warns the church to live accordingly. In verse 11, Peter builds on the thought of the passing away of the present heavens and earth with a since/then premise: since what was just said is true, then you should live a certain way.

The "since," or motivation, of Peter's premise is remembering the sinful and ungodly systems of the world will be judged when Jesus returns. The coming judgment will purge the world as we know it of all sin and the stains from the fall. Knowing this should compel God's people, the "then" of the premise, to live with holiness and godliness.



Voices from Church History

"Wherever the Holy Spirit is present, He makes men of gold out of men of clay."³

—John Chrysostom
(circa 347-407)

Peter concludes this passage by declaring that righteousness dwells in the new heavens and the new earth. Jesus will make a new heavens and earth because the old heavens and earth were saturated with the curse of sin due to the fall of Adam. Adam's sin cursed humanity and nature. However, when the last Adam, our Lord Jesus, shall come again, that curse will be reversed and the Edenic conditions prior to the fall will return, for Christ will make all things new. The Lord will come down and dwell in the midst of His people and be their God (Rev. 21:3). When we remember this, we can stand steadfast and immovable with patience because our Lord's promise is true and we know great reward awaits those who persevere to the end.



How does the since/then construction used in the Bible help us consider our motivations for obeying God?

Conclusion

Patiently waiting, even when we know what we are waiting on will come, is difficult to be sure. Moreover, our goal is not merely to wait for God to make good on His promises to us. Instead, we are to make the most of our time as we wait. We join in with God in His purpose while we wait, and we find hope in knowing that one day Jesus will return for us and make right everything that is wrong. At the same time, we find purpose in knowing that every day Jesus does not return is another day we have to share the gospel with others. So, what are you doing today?

CHRIST CONNECTION: When some scoffed at the early Christian hope in Jesus' second coming, the apostle Peter explained that God's timetable is different than ours. He is patient in giving people time to turn to Him in faith. The Day of Judgment will come, however, and Jesus will return and establish a new heavens and new earth.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to see His patience toward us as an opportunity to grow in holiness and to call others to repentance.

1. What are some things we can do to help us remember the commands and promises in Scripture?

2. What can you do this week to show and share the gospel with someone who has graciously been given time to repent?

3. How can we ensure our holy and godly lives point others to God rather than simply call attention to ourselves?

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